The Reading Experience of Young Successful Boy Readers

by

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Contents

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Some of the results in chapter 6 have been previously published in the following journal article:

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Abstract

In this study, the reading experience of six young successful boy readers is examined with a view to identifying ways in which the reading achievements of all boys might be raised. Initially, the experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers are identified, including aspects from the home and the school, and those characteristics from within children themselves. Next, literature on boys' reading is examined, and this shows that there are many negative influences on the reading lives of boys generally.

The reading experience of the six young successful boy readers is then investigated through empirical work. The central approach adopted is multiple case study using ethnographic tools. The six boys were reading fluently and for pleasure by the end of their Reception year (aged 5 years) and were studied for a two year period. Observation and research conversation were the main data collection methods adopted; the boys' experience as young successful readers was examined by observing them in their homes and schools, and by talking to them, their parents and their teachers.

The results illustrate that the six young boys who are successful readers have a masculine identity in which reading has a secure and positive place. They have overcome the negative influences which frequently impact on the reading experience of boys and have successfully integrated ways of being a boy and being a reader. The boys' reading is highly developed at home by living in a 'reading family'. The boys use their advanced achievement in reading to gain a high status position in the classroom; their reading behaviour makes them popular and powerful with their peers. Hence these boys make reading work for them and, subsequently, it is a desirable feature of their developing masculine identity.

These results are reflected upon to identify ways in which the reading achievements of all boys might be raised. I have suggested that schools might be encouraged to develop their reading curriculum in a number of ways, including spending more time reading extended texts for pleasure and using high status texts from boys' vernacular reading in the formal reading curriculum. In addition, I argue that all boys might benefit from examining the gender assumptions on which texts and their own reading preferences are based.

Introduction

In this study I shall argue that young boys who are successful readers have a masculine identity in which reading has a secure and positive place. They have overcome the 'abrasive rub' between boys and literacy (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:197) and have successfully integrated ways of being a boy and being a reader. The boys' reading is highly developed at home by living in a 'reading family', and they use their advanced achievement in reading to gain a high status position in the classroom; their reading behaviour makes them popular and powerful with their peers. Hence these boys make reading work for them and, subsequently, it is a desirable feature of their developing masculine identity. This work will be used to reflect on ways in which the reading achievements of *all* boys can be raised.

This study will therefore contribute to the discussion on raising children's reading achievements, specifically those of boys. Boys' reading achievements are currently an area of concern to the government and educationalists since their achievements are lower than those of girls. An examination of reading achievements at Key Stage 1 (age 7 years) in 2003 shows that in the standardised assessments tasks/tests (SATs) there are significant differences in boys' and girls' attainment:

Percentage of pupils achieving level 2 or above:

	2001	2002	2003
Boys	80	81	80
Girls	88	88	88

Percentage of pupils achieving level 3 or above:

	2001	2002	2003
Boys	25	26	24
Girls	33	34	32

(Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2004)

These figures illustrate that 7-8% more girls than boys are achieving the expected level for their age (level 2) and 8% more girls than boys are exceeding the expected level (level 3). The trend of girls achieving more highly than boys in reading has been constant over a number of years and the trend is the same at ages 11 and 16 (DfES 2004). The statistics, then, indicate that gender is a highly significant factor in reading achievement. The phenomenon of the lower performance of boys compared to girls was recognised by the government in the mid 1990s (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 1993, Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)/Ofsted 1996). Subsequently, a number of publications have been produced by the government, and other bodies with an interest in educational performance, which identify boys' underachievement in English as a problem and offer schools support in addressing the issue (for example: School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) 1996, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 1997 and 1998, Frater 2000, Mitchell 2000, National Literacy Trust 2004).

One way to investigate how children's reading achievements can be improved is to analyse successful readers (those achieving level 3) and identify those experiences and behaviours which are associated with their success. If such features can be identified, then it might be possible to introduce them into the reading experience of less successful readers in order to improve their performance.

Despite the current focus on boys' underachievement in reading, it is important to remember that not all boys are underachieving. This is recognised by Rowan et al (2002) who argue that 'not all boys are doing badly in literacy classrooms' (2002:35). The statistics above indicate that around a quarter of boys are achieving the higher levels of attainment in reading (level 3 at age 7). In this study, then, those boys who are identified as high achievers in reading will be the focus for study. Underachievement is frequently examined by studying those children who are experiencing difficulties; in fact, I was unable to find any previous research which focused solely on young boys who are successful readers. I therefore hope that studying the experience of six young boys who are successful readers will make a unique contribution to the literature on raising the reading performance of all boys.

This investigation of young successful boy readers will begin by examining previous research in the area. Since I was unable to find any literature specifically relating to this group of readers, two related areas will be examined; the reading experiences and behaviours of young successful readers where both boys and girls were studied, and boys' reading generally. Initially, then, experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers will be identified from the literature on children's reading. This will include experiences associated with the home and the school, and behaviours associated with children themselves. The literature makes little reference to individual differences in children, particularly regarding gender and ethnicity. Next, literature on boys' reading will be examined. This will include what is known about boys' reading habits and how these differ from those of girls, and what is known about the effect of being a boy on reading experiences at home and at school. It will

be seen that there are many negative features associated with the combined experiences of reading and of being a boy; in fact, I could not find any literature which identifies any feature of reading success that is associated with being a boy. The literature, then, offers some explanation for differences in reading achievement between girls and boys; in fact, given the extent of the negative aspects, it is perhaps surprising that the differences are not greater.

Having examined the literature on young successful readers and on boys' reading, I chose to investigate the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of these young successful boy readers. Specifically, I wanted to explore the extent to which the experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers are in place for these boys, and how they overcome any negative influences associated with reading and being a boy in order to become successful readers. In addition, I wanted to investigate the boys' reading habits and preferences, in order to discover what these young successful boys read and the place of this reading in their lives.

The central research question for this study is therefore the following: What is the reading experience of young successful boy readers? In order to investigate the areas highlighted above, this central question has been broken down into the following questions: What are the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of young successful boy readers? What are the reading habits and preferences of young successful boy readers? What patterns emerge in the reading experience of young successful boy readers?

These questions will be investigated in the empirical work in this study. In order to collect relevant data, particular research approaches and data collection methods were adopted. The central approach is multiple case study using ethnographic tools. Six boys who were reading fluently and for pleasure by the end of their Reception year (aged 5 years) were studied for a two year period (they all achieved level 3 in reading at the end of Key Stage 1). Observation and research conversation were the main data collection methods used; the boys' experience as young successful readers was examined by observing them in their homes and schools, and by talking to them, their parents and their teachers. Issues concerned with carrying out research with children will be considered and ways of ensuring that the boys' own voices are heard and reported will be explored.

The results of the empirical work will be presented in two chapters. Initially, the extent to which the experiences and behaviours associated with successful reading are in place for the six boys will be discussed and analysed. Next, ways in which the six boys overcome negative gender influences associated with reading and being a boy will be identified and analysed. Finally, the results will be reflected upon to construct the masculine identity of these young successful boy readers and to identify ways in which the reading achievements of all boys might be raised.

Chapter 1: Experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers

In the introduction, it was noted that one way to raise children's achievements in reading is to examine successful readers and identify those experiences and behaviours which are associated with their success. If such aspects can be identified, then it might be possible to introduce them into the reading experience of less successful readers in order to improve their performance. This chapter will attempt to identify the experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers from a range of literature on children's reading. Studies of children who have learnt to read unusually early will be central to this investigation since these readers are likely to display characteristics associated with successful reading. Other research on children learning to read will also be consulted since many children learn to read successfully and achieve high levels of attainment in their reading (level 3 at age 7) without having been early fluent readers. Literature on the effective teaching of reading will be consulted in order to consider the school context.

In this chapter, analysis of the literature on young successful readers will be presented in three sections: experiences associated with the home, behaviours associated with the child and experiences associated with the school.

1.1 Biological and environmental differences between children

Before identifying experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers, it is necessary to consider the influence of biological and environmental differences between children. It could be argued that the most significant aspect

associated with successful reading is innate intelligence (biological factor); some children are born with a greater capacity for learning to read than others. However, it is important to recognise that, even if this is the case, environmental aspects will still have an impact on children's reading achievements. It is likely that individuals are born with potential in different areas of development, and that their life experiences influence their achievements and interests. When studying early readers, Clark (1976) recognises that their early development is a result of both innate potential and environmental characteristics, and that it is necessary 'to consider the characteristics of their environment which, *interacting with* their potential skills, have assisted this precocious development' (her italics) (1976:24). Clark highlights the 'crucial role' of the environment:

> That the attributes of the particular child were an important aspect of the situation is not denied but the crucial role of the environment, the experiences which the child obtained, their relevance to his interest and the readiness of the adults to encourage and to build upon these, should not be underestimated. (1976:106)

Clark specifically identifies the child's experiences, his/her interest in them, and the role of adults in developing these as highly significant environmental aspects; these environmental aspects will be discussed below. Whilst it is recognised that both biological and environmental aspects have an influence on children's reading, the focus of this study will be on environmental influences. One reason for this is that biological differences between children cannot be changed, whereas environmental aspects can be influenced. In order to raise children's reading achievements, it is necessary to identify those aspects which can be changed rather than those which are static. Another reason is that my interest is in social rather than psychological aspects

of reading; hence environmental, rather than biological, influences will be the focus for examination.

1.2 Experiences associated with the home

In this section, home experiences associated with young successful readers will be discussed. Many theorists recognise that successful reading starts in the home in the pre-school years (Holdaway 1979, Y. Goodman 1984, Teale and Sulzby 1986, Hall 1987, Clay 1991). Studies have shown that the following experiences are associated with young successful readers: children's homes are rich literate environments, their parents read to and with them, they listen to stories, their parents have positive attitudes to reading, and their homes are emotionally warm and stable.

1.2.1 The home is a rich literate environment

The first home experience associated with young successful readers is that children live in homes which are rich literate environments. Studies of early readers consistently identify this feature of the children's homes (Krippner 1963, Clark 1976, Forester 1977, Bissex 1980, Van Lierop 1985); the children live in homes which contain a wide range of reading resources (for example: books, newspapers, magazines, letters, address books, diaries/calendars, computers) and reading activities are integrated into everyday life rather than being separate from it.

A number of further studies support these findings. Taylor (1983) studied the literacy habits of six families over three years. She notes that in the families she studied 'literacy is deeply embedded in the social processes of family life and is not some specific list of activities added to the family agenda to explicitly teach reading'

(1983:92-3). Literacy activities are functional and are carried out as part of family life, hence children see reading as meaningful. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) comment that a key factor is not the quantity of literacy materials available, but that they are highly accessible, with parents and children 'more or less constantly tripping over them' (1984:43). They note that pre-school aged children have a natural affinity for books and for paper and pencil activities and will use them if they are readily available in the environment. Weinberger (1996) studied children's literacy at home and at school and, regarding the sorts of print available to children at home, she notes that 'what we see here is probably a different, and possibly wider, range of printed material than most children commonly make use of in school' (1996:81). She suggests that children have a greater range of reading materials available to them at home than in the early years of school.

In addition to being rich reading environments, studies of early readers also note that the homes are rich language environments; the children live in homes where interested adults talk to them and answer their questions (Krippner 1963, Durkin 1966, Clark 1976, Forester 1977). This work is significant because language development is a precursor to literacy development. The children's earliest attempts to interact with and make meaning from the language in their world are encouraged and this develops into attempts to interact with and make meaning from the print in their world. The importance of the home in developing early language is also asserted by Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Wells (1986). In their studies of early language development, they found that not only is the home a rich environment for language development, but that it is richer than nursery and school environments. Tizard and Hughes (1984) found that children's conversations with their mothers, in the context

of everyday living, covered a wide variety of topics, and that the children constantly talked, argued and asked genuine questions of great complexity. By comparison, children's conversations with their teachers focused on answering simple questions and taking part in short exchanges concerned with the whereabouts of other children or toys.

1.2.1.1 Library usage

A significant finding from Clark's study (1976) of early readers is concerned with library usage and 'the role played by the library in catering for and in stimulating the interests of these children' (1976:103). The early readers she studied make regular use of a local library in order to obtain reading materials which provide for and broaden their interests. Stainthorp and Hughes (2000) also discuss the significance of library use. In addition to borrowing books, they note an additional value of library visits; visiting the library requires a positive effort, so parents are signalling to children that they are places to be valued. Minns (1999) studied the reading of five children from when they were aged four years. She recently returned to them, aged fifteen years, and notes that those children who had been introduced to the library before starting school were still using it. She comments that parents therefore have a significant role in providing the initial impetus for library membership. Library visiting therefore has a number of advantages: it adds to the rich reading environment of the home by ensuring that the reading materials available to children provide for and broaden their interests, it shows children that libraries are places to be valued, and it sets up library visiting as a lifelong practice.

1.2.1.2 Environmental print

As well as providing a wide range of reading resources, homes are also rich sources of environmental print. Children's first reading experiences are likely to be with environmental print; as soon as they start to take an interest in their surroundings they will notice print, both inside and outside the home. Smith (1985) notes that the 'isolated but meaningful words and fragments of sentences' that children see in their environment are as important as book sessions for raising their awareness that print carries meaning (1985:132). Hall (1987) notes that 'environmental print provides encounters with written language' and that 'the emergence of literacy is facilitated by environmental print' (1987:29). Print in the environment allows children to develop their understanding that writing is meaningful and functional.

Environmental print therefore plays an important part in children's early reading development, and studies of early readers found that children use this print in the home and that this is encouraged by their parents. Torrey (1973) discusses a boy who learned to read from television commercials and labels on cans and boxes, and Bissex (1980) notes that her son lives in a house full of print, and that 'he read labels, titles, signs, and writing on commercial packages, especially cereal boxes' (1980:123). It is interesting to note the frequency with which cereal packets are mentioned (Clay 1979:72; Bissex 1980:123; Heath 1982:50; Heath 1983:193; Taylor 1983:30; K. Goodman 1986:43; Minns 1990:37 and 1990:121; Purcell-Gates 1996:425). Cereal boxes seem to be a print-form which is particularly interesting to children; perhaps because they are there in front of them as they eat their breakfast and perhaps because of the free gifts which are often found inside the boxes and represented in picture and print on the outside of the box. Bissex (1980) notes that environmental print was

particularly enjoyed in the early stages before her son was fluent enough to read continuous text. Significantly for this study, Clark (1976) suggests that the boys in her study show a greater interest in environmental print than the girls:

> While a number of children were first attracted to reading through stories, a number began with signs, advertisements, or letter games. ... for some of the children the print in their immediate environment played an important role. This was particularly true of the boys who showed interest in signposts, car names, captions on television and names on products at the supermarkets. (1973:51)

This observation is supported by the work of Torrey (1973) and Bissex (1980) who both note the significant place of environmental print in the reading experiences of the child they studied, and they both studied a boy.

Homes in which children learn to read successfully are therefore rich reading environments in which reading activities occur as part of everyday family life. They contain a wide range of books, other print forms and environmental print. In addition, parents add to these reading materials and set up lifelong practices by taking children to local libraries.

1.2.2 Parents read to and with their children

A second home experience associated with young successful readers is that parents read to and with their children. Studies of early readers note that children having books read to them from the earliest stages is associated with successful reading development (Durkin 1966, Clark 1976, Bissex 1980). Durkin (1966) notes that forty-four out of her forty-six early readers are read to at home, and Bissex (1980), in a

study on her son, notes that 'we had read aloud to him almost nightly since he was old enough to enjoy a story (some time between one and two years of age)' (1980:3-4).

A number of other theorists have noted the importance of reading to children in the pre-school years. Smith (1978) notes that being read to allows children to understand the functions and structures of the written language. Clay (1979) identifies three things that children can learn from being read to: that print can be turned into speech; that there is a message recorded in print; and that some language units are more likely to occur than others. Teale (1984) identifies the following four areas of literacy development as those that move a child from being a non-literate person to an independent reader: assumptions about the functions and uses of written language; concepts of print, books and reading, and the form and structure of written language; attitudes towards reading; and strategies such as self-monitoring and predicting. Significantly, Teale notes that 'reading to children has been found to have beneficial effects for each of these four aspects of preschool children's literacy development' (1984:115). Wells (1986) notes that children who obtain high scores on a knowledge-of-literacy test at five years are likely to have parents who read to them. Meek (1991) notes that reading to children introduces them to the language of books which is different from the language of speech and conversation.

Other groups of educationalists have focused specifically on studying the role of parents in reading with children once they have started school, particularly in sharing their school reading books with them. The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education 1967) recommends that there should be closer links between schools and parents, and a number of subsequent projects have supported the value of teacher-

parent collaboration for children's reading (The Haringey Project, Tizard et al 1982,

Hewison 1985; The Belfield Reading Project, Hannon and Jackson 1987; PACT,

Griffiths and King 1985). Topping (1985) notes that the value of parental involvement

in reading focuses on modeling, practice, feedback and reinforcement. He compares

teacher and parental input and concludes that in parental input:

M   Modelling – is more powerful

P   Practice – is more regular

F   Feedback – is more immediate

R   Reinforcement – is more valuable

(1985:25)

He notes the value of parental enthusiasm, extra practice, one-to-one feedback and the

power of positive parental response. Hannon (1995) notes that 'much of children's

literacy learning takes place before school or out of school – mainly in fact, at home'

(1995:1). In a research project which analysed parents and teachers in reading

sessions with children, Hannon et al (1986) found that the strategies used by parents

and teachers were very similar and that both showed a concern for understanding.

Hannon (1995) states that the implications of this study are that:

> there are no grounds for considering that parents as a group are not up to the
>
> job of hearing their children read at home. Indeed the Sheffield study suggests
>
> that parents at home have important advantages over teachers in school in
>
> terms of the greater amount of time they can spend in hearing reading, their
>
> freedom from interruptions, and their closer relationship with the children.
>
> (1995:97)

Hannon notes that parents have more time to read with their children, are free from

interruptions which are common in the classroom and have an advantage in the

closeness of the parent-child relationship. Hence parents are 'up to the job' of hearing children read at home.

Tobin (1982) identifies the types of parental assistance which appear to be most helpful to children. These consist of two strategies; directing the child's attention to the relationship between spoken and written words, and helping the child understand the materials that are read aloud. Parents are very well placed to help children understand what has been read, since they can draw on their shared experiences. These allow the parents to help children make sense of a text by referring to past experiences and existing knowledge. Heath (1982) also discusses this 'life-to-text interaction' strategy; parents ask questions and encourage responses to help children use their knowledge of the world to make sense of the text. Significantly, there is little or no separation between reading for pleasure and learning to read in parent-child reading experiences.

1.2.2.1 Meaning-making

Learning to read is a social process in which meanings and understandings are mutually negotiated or socially constructed with others. Hence when parents read with their children they help them by negotiating and constructing meanings and understandings together. Teale (1984) comments that:

> Virtually all analyses of what occurs when parents read to their children ... show that the events are socially interactive ones in which the actual reading of the text and the meaning produced in the reading are constructed through a cooperative negotiation between adult and child. (1984:118)

In parent-child reading interactions, meaning is socially constructed; adults and children read and negotiate meanings together. This finding is supported by Meek (1991) who notes that when parents read with children, the children talk constantly about the story, the words and the pictures; they take a very active part in the interaction. Meek, citing Dombey's analysis of a mother and child reading together, notes that both mother and child are 'attending, in different ways, to the author's words and negotiating their meaning by referring to events and objects in their own remembered experience' (1991:91). Together, they construct an understanding of the words in the book, using their remembered shared experiences.

The understanding of reading as a meaning-making process emerged during the 1970s and caused a paradigm shift in the teaching of reading from a focus on decoding words, to a focus on making meaning from texts. This shift was initiated by the work of psycholinguists who had been influenced by the work of linguists, such as Macnamara (1972) and Halliday (1973, 1975). Halliday argued that 'learning language is learning how to mean' (1973:24) and the psycholinguists extended this notion to the reading process; learning to read is learning how to make meaning from print and texts. One of the first influential psycholinguists was K. Goodman (1967, 1986). Goodman's main principle for reading is that readers construct meaning during reading, and that comprehension of meaning is always the goal of readers; hence meaning informs word recognition, not vice versa. Goodman believes that language is 'learnt from whole to part'. The starting point should be meaningful texts consisting of 'natural' language (whole language), not artificially produced language constructed to emphasise letter sounds and word recognition (part language). He believes that language learning is more effective at home than at school because whole language is

used at home and part language is used at school. (When Goodman talks about language learning, this includes literacy learning.) Goodman (1967) famously said that 'reading is a psycho-linguistic guessing game' (1986:38). He was referring to informed guessing, whereby children 'predict, select, confirm, and self-correct' (1986:38) as they seek to make meaning from print. They guess or make hypotheses about what will occur in the text based on their prior learning and experience. Hypothesis-generating and testing are therefore considered significant parts of the language learning process. In successful parent-child reading interactions, then, children's attempts at meaning-making are shared with their parents; they receive feedback on their 'guesses', hence their reading development is supported.

Another psycholinguist whose work was highly influential at this time was Smith (1971, 1973). Like Goodman, he places meaning at the centre of the reading process. Smith proposes that 'the information that passes from the brain to the eye is more important in reading than the information that passes from the eye to the brain' (1971:9). He believes that reading relies on information stored in the brain, rather than on information derived from the written words on the page; readers start with the prior knowledge and understanding they have, rather than with the written words on the page. He believes that fluent readers read meanings rather than words, and that they do not look at individual words on a page. He argues that guessing and making errors are necessary for children to test out and obtain feedback on whether the rules and hypotheses they have generated are correct. Smith believes that children learn to read by reading. He explains:

> Learning to read is a complex and delicate task in which almost all the rules, all the cues, and all the feedback can be obtained only through the process of

reading itself. Children learn to read only by reading. Therefore the only way
to facilitate their learning to read is to make reading easy for them. (1973:195)

Reading is made easy for children by ensuring cues are available, providing feedback
at the right time and providing encouragement. In parent-child interactions, then,
parents take on the role of providing feedback and encouragement, hence children's
reading development is supported.

Smith (1985, 1988) also developed the notion of a 'literacy club'; a group of people
who are written language users – readers and writers. Children learn about print by
joining the literacy club; they learn from other people by 'joining the club' of people
they see as being like themselves and by being helped to engage in their activities
(1988:vii). Smith notes that 'children must be fully accepted into the literacy club, so
that they can receive all of the different kinds of demonstration and collaboration they
require to become readers themselves' (1985:137). Those who are more experienced
read and write in front of children and with them during the course of everyday life
and the children are invited to emulate this behaviour. In this way, they become
members of the club and learn to use literacy. Smith notes that children are admitted
as 'junior members'; they are not expected to be highly skilled, but they are helped to
read and write whenever they express a purpose or an interest of their own. Parent-
child reading interactions, then, are one way in which parents help children join the
'literacy club'.

1.2.2.2 Scaffolding

The work which has been examined above shows that effective literacy learning is a
social process; learning occurs when children and adults, or other more experienced

literacy-users, interact together. The role of the more experienced reader is to 'model' and 'scaffold' reading for children. Modelling involves experienced readers demonstrating reading practices (see section 1.2.4.1 below), and scaffolding involves experienced readers supporting and guiding children's early attempts at reading.

Scaffolding is a term used by Bruner, building on the work of Vygotsky (1978). The work of these two theorists was highly influential in the paradigm shift evident in the 1970s, when the notion that children's learning is a social, rather than individual, process gained popularity. Vygotsky (1978) notes that children have two developmental levels; the 'actual' one indicating what the child can do on his/her own, and the 'potential' one indicating what he/she can do with the help of an adult or more experienced peer. Vygotsky called the distance between these levels the 'Zone of Proximal Development' or 'ZPD'. He explains:

> In the zone of proximal development assistance is provided by the teacher, the adult, the expert, the more capable peer whatever the activity and through this assistance learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (1978:90)

Children learn by being guided through the ZPD. Initially children can only perform at the more advanced level through interacting with others; however, after practice, the processes become internalised and they are able to perform these activities on their own. This guiding through the ZPD is the process which Bruner calls 'scaffolding'

(Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Scaffolding has become a popular term for many types of support for learning.

Parents who read to and with their children are therefore scaffolding their children's learning. Through reading with their children, they support their children's early attempts to make meaning from books – their early attempts at reading. Teale (1984) notes that, as children develop, 'this parental scaffolding self-destructs as the child takes over more of the interaction' (1984:118). Gradually, children no longer need the scaffolding and become independent readers; the discussions which are explicit in the early interactions with texts become internalised and children can read successfully on their own.

1.2.2.3 Influence of cultural context

When parents read to and with their children they are introducing them to the reading practices of their culture. Children's reading development is highly dependent on the cultural context in which they live; different cultures have different reading practices and children learn the reading practices of the culture in which they live.

Heath (1982) discusses 'ways of taking' from books and notes that such behaviours are culturally influenced and are learned through adult-child interactions. By comparing book-reading interactions in three different cultural contexts, Heath shows that:

> children have to learn to select, hold, and retrieve content from books and other written or printed texts in accordance with their community's rules or "ways of taking," and the children's learning follows community paths of

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language socialisation. (1982:70)

Children learn their community's 'ways of taking' through book interactions with adults, usually their parents. Heath's work shows that the process of constructing meaning is culturally influenced rather than being universal. With regard to children learning to read, some 'ways of taking' from books are more helpful than other, hence some cultural contexts are more helpful to the young reader than others.

Heath (1983) expands these ideas in a seminal ethnographic study, *Ways With Words.* Over nine years, she studied children learning language and literacy at home and at school in three North American communities: Roadville – a white working-class community, Trackton – a black working-class community, and Maintown – the area occupied by largely professional mainstream black and white people of the region. Heath noted that in Roadville mothers bought books for their children, read simple books to them and that preschool children often had bedtime stories read to them. However, she also noted that this book-reading focused on labelling items, simple re-telling, and did not extend beyond the book into comparisons with the real world. The consequence of this was that when the children entered school they initially did well, when simple labelling was required, but subsequently did less well, when activities required more advanced and independent thinking. Children in Trackton lived in a community where oral communication dominated and parents did not buy books for their children. When reading did occur it was a public group affair and individuals who read alone were considered socially inept. The consequence of this was that when children went to school they did not do well because, whilst they had some valuable skills (for example, oral story-telling and analogical skills), they did not have the skills which were necessary for school learning; for example, the ability to

decontextualise and to use symbolic and imaginative language. The Maintown people shared values, attitudes and beliefs about education with the school. Their children's preschool book-reading experiences ensured that when they started school they were able to apply knowledge gained in one context to another context, answer the types of questions typically asked about stories in reading lessons, and give personal comments on stories they heard or read. They had learnt to work in a decontexualised way using symbolic language; they had learnt the right kind of reading for school. Heath concludes that the impact of the children's cultures is highly significant. In all three communities, literacy usage differed significantly. These differences were rooted in deep cultural patterns of language use.

All children learn about literacy from their cultural contexts, but they do not all learn the same literacy, and this has an impact on subsequent school learning. The literacy learning of the townspeople in Heath's study was closest to the model of literacy learning in school, hence those children achieved most highly at school. The children from Roadville and Trackton had learnt to become literate but, because their literacies were different from the model the school offered, they had difficulty in achieving at school since alternative ways of learning were required.

Other researchers also note the impact of culture on children's literacy learning. Britton (1987) states that education is 'an effect of community'; a communal activity or a sharing of culture (1987:25). Part of children's learning is to learn their culture; to learn how their cultural operates, including how they 'do literacy'. Taylor (1983) notes that, in the families she studied, reading and writing were 'cultural activities intrinsic to their experiences' (1983:79). Reading and writing take place as family

activities, and are therefore defined by the cultural context in which the family operates. Y. Goodman (1984) notes that children's literacy development grows from their experiences, and from 'the views and attitudes towards literacy that they encounter as they interact with social groups' (1984:103). Meek (1991) makes an important observation; she argues that cultural literacy practices are not static, but change over time. She notes that children enter their culture at a given point in history, but they then change cultural language and literacy practices over a period of time.

When parents read to and with children, children will learn to read according to the reading practices of the culture in which they live; parent-child reading interactions are culturally defined, not universal. Some cultural contexts are more helpful for learning to read than others. It is likely, then, that successful readers, where success is defined by school achievement, will live in a cultural context in which their home reading practices are similar to the reading practices of the school.

To summarise this section, an experience associated with successful reading is that parents read to and with their children. Through these interactions, parents share in the meaning-making process and scaffold children's attempts at reading. In addition, parents teach children their cultural reading practices and this will contribute to their success if these are similar to school reading practices.

1.2.3 Children listen to stories

A third home experience associated with young successful readers is that children listen to stories. This activity is particularly worthy of attention because listening to

stories, rather than sharing a range of text types with parents, is believed to make a specific contribution to successful reading development and children's wider learning.

The importance of listening to stories is asserted most strongly by Wells (1986) in the results of the Bristol Study. Wells identifies three frequently occurring early literacy-related activities: looking at a picture book and talking about it, listening to a story, and drawing and colouring. In his sample children, he looked at the frequency of each of these compared with two literacy measures: a knowledge of literacy test taken at age five years, and a test of reading comprehension taken after two years at school. He concludes that:

> Of the three frequently occurring activities that had been considered as possibly helpful preparation for the acquisition of literacy, only one was significantly associated with the later test scores, and it was clearly associated with both of them. That activity was listening to stories. (1986:151)

Listening to stories is identified as the activity which is most influential on children's knowledge of literacy at five years, and comprehension at seven years. Wells believes that listening to stories is extremely important because it allows children to experience the symbolic nature of language:

> the child is beginning to discover the symbolic potential of language: its power to create possible or imaginary worlds through words – by representing experience in symbols that are independent of the objects, events, and relationships symbolized and that can be interpreted in contexts other than those in which the experiences originally occurred, if indeed it ever occurred at all. (1986:156)

Experience with the decontextualised language of stories allows children to move from understanding at a concrete level to understanding at a symbolic level. Wells notes that this is also significant in terms of school success because this type of abstract, disembedded thinking is required for school learning.

Meek (1991) notes that, before children go to school, the longest monologue of language they hear is a story. Through listening to stories, children discover how things follow on and are related to each other, the rhythms and structures of written sentences, the patterning of events, the conventions of story beginnings and endings, the symbolic uses of language and how this language is used to make worlds. In other words, they learn 'what a story *is*' (1991:153). This understanding, as well as being valuable in itself, also develops children's 'storying' skills; storying refers to constructing stories in the mind. Hardy (1968) famously said that storying is 'a primary act of mind'; that it is a function of the human mind to narratise experience. Wells (1986) also argues that storying is a fundamental way of making meaning and, as such, pervades all aspects of learning. Wells believes that through interacting with others in story experiences, children's 'own inner storying is sustained and enriched and its effectiveness as a means of making sense of experience confirmed' (1986:200). Listening to stories therefore helps children develop their own inner storying. Further, through communicating their stories to others, children are able to recognise the power that symbolic language has in organising thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Listening to stories therefore has a particular contribution to make to children's reading development and broader learning: it helps children understand and use

symbolic, abstract language; it helps them understand the story form; and it helps them develop their own 'storying' which helps them make meaning from their world.

1.2.3.1 Role of authors

Spencer (1976) was one of the first theorists to observe that authors have a significant role to play in children's reading development. She explains that the reader and the author are in a 'special relationship' and that this bond allows the reader, also a storyteller, to 'make it mean' (1976:21-2). Authors therefore help children to understand, or make meaning from, stories by inviting them to collaborate in the story and the storytelling process. She illustrates this using *Rosie's Walk* as an example: in this storybook, the author and the reader both know about the presence of the fox, who is chasing Rosie the hen, whereas Rosie, the main character, does not. The author and the reader therefore share a secret; the reader collaborates with the author and learns through sharing the story with the author. When parents read aloud such books to their children, they mediate this reader-author collaboration for their children. Spencer adds that this process can only occur with high quality children's books, hence this aspect of teaching children to read is neglected if children are given impoverished texts. Smith (1985, 1988) also recognises the role of authors as reading teachers. In his discussion of the 'literacy club', he says:

> In the literacy club you can learn from members who are far distant, who may even no longer be living. In the literacy club you can learn from *authors*.
> (1985:136)

He adds that authors are the reading teachers who are 'scarcely ever recognised' (1988:vii).

Spencer, writing as Meek (1988) believes that children learn to read by reading what she calls 'real books':

> Look for the picture books of Edward Ardizzone, John Burningham, Anthony Browne, Quentin Blake, Shirley Hughes, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, and of course, Maurice Sendak. ... Children who encounter such books learn many lessons that are hidden for ever from those who move directly from the reading scheme to the worksheet. (1988:19)

In writing high quality children's books, authors implicitly teach children to read, and teach them things that cannot be learnt through 'reading scheme' books. Meek comments that the most important lesson that children learn from high quality texts is '*the nature and variety of written discourse*; the different ways that language lets a writer tell, and the many and different ways a reader reads' (her italics) (1988:21). For example, children can see different ways that text can appear on a page, discover the rich possibilities of language, and experience intertextuality. In addition, children learn about value systems, in the real world and in texts, and about the way narratives represent these through story conventions and through metaphor.

The case for using high quality books with children is also made by Waterland (1988) who distinguishes between what she terms 'organic' and 'inorganic' books. 'Organic' books are written because an author has a desire to write a particular story in a particular way. They are multilayered with a sophistication that can be enjoyed by children and adults and they transmit the message that reading is 'good, satisfying, life-enhancing' (1988:47). An 'inorganic' book is one that has only been written to teach children to read (reading scheme books) and 'has no life of its own' (1988:41). Writing in Waterland, Hynds notes that:

The greatest teachers of reading and writing in Britain today are David McKee, Shirley Hughes, Anthony Browne, Graham Oakley, John Burningham, the Ahlbergs, Jan Pienowski, and a host of others like them. (1988:50)

He argues that these are the authors who teach children to read. More than that, they create children who choose to read for pleasure and enjoyment, and who remain lifelong readers.

1.2.4 Parents have positive attitudes to reading

A fourth home experience associated with young successful readers is that parents have a positive attitude to reading; they are keen readers themselves. Krippner (1963) and Bissex (1980), in their studies of early readers, both note that the children's parents are keen readers themselves.

1.2.4.1 Modelling

The significance of positive parental attitudes is related to the concept of modelling. It was recognised above that effective literacy learning is a social process; learning occurs when children and adults, or other more experienced literacy-users, interact together. When helping children to read, one of the roles of the more experienced reader is to model reading practices for children. Modelling involves demonstrating the required behaviour, hence it would appear that adults who ensure that children hear good stories read aloud and read every day with their children will enhance their children's experience. Wells (1986) notes the importance of modelling from the parental interviews his team carried out:

it was obvious that the parents' own interest in literacy was important: the

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number of books they owned and how much they read and wrote in accomplishing their own purposes. In this, as in so many other areas, children learn from the model provided by adult behaviour. (1986:149)

Parents model aspects of reading such as book-owning and engagement in purposeful reading activities. Topping (1992) notes that many children want to be like grown-ups, thus adults should 'demonstrate enthusiasm for books and appropriate and mature reading behaviour' (1992:173). He notes that children particularly want to be like the most significant adults in their lives; their parents. He believes that parental modelling is therefore more effective than teacher modelling. Topping adds that modelling is more powerful when the child is emotionally involved with and wants to be like the adult. Significantly for this study, he suggests that the father's role may be particularly crucial in modelling for boys. Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) note that the parents of the children in their study 'had positive personal attitudes, which they modelled for their children either deliberately or subconsciously' (1999:156).

It seems, then, that when parents enjoy reading, own books and read to find things out, this behaviour is demonstrated to children. Because children want to be like grown-ups, they are likely to imitate this modelled behaviour, and this helps them become successful readers.

1.2.5 The home is emotionally warm and stable

A final home experience associated with young successful readers is that the home is emotionally warm and stable. Van Lierop (1985) and Stainthorp and Hughes (2000), in their studies of early readers, both note that the children came from emotionally warm and stable homes. Children will be predisposed to learn when they feel secure,

and parents will be predisposed to take on their critical role, taking time to read with children and answer their questions, when they feel content and relaxed. Evidence seems to indicate that children make most progress with their reading development when reading is carried out in a non-pressurised, informal environment. Clark (1976) notes that the early readers in her study develop their language and literacy skills in a 'warm, accepting and non-pressurized environment' (1976:48) where activities are aligned to children's interests and carried out as part of everyday life. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) note that the 'worst disasters' occur when 'parents set out to formally "teach letter names," "teach the alphabet," or engage in other school-like reading and writing tasks' (1984:43).

Reading development is therefore supported when children are in emotionally warm and stable homes and when reading is carried out in a non-pressurised way, as part of everyday life rather than through formal tasks.

1.3 Behaviours associated with the child

In this section, behaviours associated with young successful readers that come from within the children themselves will be discussed; the children are self-motivated and are phonologically sensitive.

1.3.1 The child is self-motivated

Research suggests that young successful readers are likely to be self-motivated; the notion of children teaching themselves to read was identified as a feature of early readers. Durkin (1966) observes that the children she studied took the initiative to read themselves, and were persistent, readily absorbed and serious about their reading,

indicating a high level of motivation and interest in reading. Torrey (1973) and Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) both note an element of self-teaching in the early readers they studied. Torrey (1973) comments that the early reader in her study appeared 'to have asked just the right questions in his own mind about the relation between language and print and thus to have been able to bridge the gap between his own language and the printed form' (1973:156). Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) believe that their young early readers (YERs) and non-early readers (NERs) had all experienced high quality literacy activities in the home. What made the difference was that, 'the YERs had been able to capitalise on these experiences and teach themselves to read' (1999:157), whereas the NERs had not been able to do. In both these studies, children displayed an element of self-motivation; they used their early language and literacy experiences to teach themselves to read.

A number of other theorists note that self-motivation is an important factor in the learning process. Tizard and Hughes (1984) comment that a significant factor in the linguistic and intellectual development of the children they studied was their own curiosity and wish to learn. Wells (1986) observes that the child's own interest in reading is an important factor in their reading development:

> This was measured not only by the number of books he or she personally owned, but by the general interest displayed in written language, in the form of signs, advertisements, labels, as well as the more conventional books and magazines. (1986:149)

Wells notes that interest can also be measured by how absorbed children become in literacy activities; how long they chose to spend on them. Meek (1991) suggests that

children have to want to read for themselves and not to please an adult. She comments that learners have to discover what reading is good for and what is in it for them.

1.3.2 The child is phonologically sensitive

A link has been noted between young successful readers and phonological sensitivity (the ability to hear sounds in words). Stainthorp and Hughes (2000), in their study of early readers, found that the difference between young early readers and non early readers lay in 'their individual sensitivity to the phonological aspects of language' (2000:53). They found that children who read early had greater phonological sensitivity than those who did not.

The work of psychologists has contributed to an understanding of the link between phonological sensitivity and successful reading. The psychologists explore literacy learning from a different perspective to the psycholinguists. Their approach to literacy learning has been called a 'bottom-up' model; children start with the letters and words and work up to texts. (The psycholinguists work with a 'top-down' model; they start with children's previous knowledge, understanding and experiences, and work down to words and letters.) Influential work in this area has been carried out by Goswami and Bryant (1990); their research shows a link between children's awareness of rhyme and alliteration and their progress in reading. They found that children are able to divide a word into its onset (e.g. 'c') and rime (e.g. 'at') and categorise words by their onset or rime, and that the greater the children's facility with this phonological skill, the greater success they achieved in early reading.

Successful readers are also able to decode words rapidly and automatically. The work of the psychologists suggests that successful readers do read every word in a text. Harrison (1992) notes that since the mid-1970s, computers and laser technology have made 'eye-movement data' available to psychologists and that this shows that fluent readers do look at every word when reading, and that word recognition is very rapid and occurs automatically, without the reader making use of context. This clearly contradicts the psycholinguists' understanding of the place of word recognition in fluent reading which was discussed above (section 1.2.2.1). The psychologists' view is that readers look at every word and word recognition is automatic and rapid; the psycholinguists' view is that individual words are not identified (Smith and Goodman 1973) and that individual word recognition hinders fluent reading (Smith 1971). Harrison does, however, assert the psycholinguists' view that meaning, not word recognition, is the goal of fluent reading. The research discussed in this section highlights the fact that there is not a consensus on the way in which children learn to read. (Current teaching practices include 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' models in the belief that children learn to read most successfully by approaching a text with a range of strategies at their disposal).

This study will only make limited reference to children's abilities to hear sounds and decode the words they encounter. It was noted above that my interest is in social and cultural, rather than psychological, aspects of reading; hence children's phonological sensitivity and decoding skills will only be considered in a limited way.

1.4 Experiences associated with the school

There is very little reference to schools in studies of early readers. One reason for this is that most of the readers in these studies learnt to read at home before starting school. The studies by Clark (1976) and Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) are the only ones which consider the experiences of early readers at school and they tend to describe the children's school experiences rather than identify aspects which contribute to their continued success in reading. Clark (1976), for example, notes that the teachers of the early readers in her study comment that the children have good concentration and wide interests, are popular with other children and many are considered leaders.

Waterland (1988) recognises that the home and the school are both valuable contexts for children's reading development, but in different ways; the value of the school is that it 'can offer expertise, suitable texts and understanding of progression' (1988:22). Scheerens (1992) analysis of research on school effectiveness identifies two characteristics of effective schools which have 'multiple empirical research confirmation': structured teaching and effective learning time (1992:84). This work does not refer specifically to literacy lessons; however, it will be seen that these characteristics are supported by research on effective literacy teaching (e.g. Wragg et al 1998, Frater 2001, Wray et al 2002). Building on Waterland's work and literature on school effectiveness, then, I would suggest that the following school experiences can be associated with successful reading: provision of high quality reading resources, structured teaching and effective learning time. The teacher should provide resources which ensure that children regard reading as enjoyable and useful, provide structured reading programmes with clear learning objectives which move children on from the

knowledge and understanding they have, and ensure that learning time is managed effectively using a balance of whole class, group and individual teaching methods.

1.4.1 Provision of high quality reading resources

The first school experience associated with successful reading is that high quality reading resources are provided. Children who are provided with a range of high quality texts are more likely to be motivated to read for pleasure and to find out information. Waterland notes that 'organic' books should be prioritised since it is these books, rather than 'inorganic' books (reading scheme books), which create readers (see section 1.2.3.1 above). Current statutory requirements require teachers to use a range of texts with children. The statutory requirements for the teaching of reading in state-maintained schools are outlined in *The National Curriculum: Handbook for primary teachers in England* (NC) (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)/QCA 1999) and non-statutory guidelines are provided in *The National Literacy Strategy: Framework for teaching* (NLS) (DfEE 1998). (Despite being a non-statutory document, the NLS has been adopted by most schools in England.) These documents outline a range of fiction, poetry and non-fiction text types (including Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on-screen texts) for use in the classroom.

Criticisms have been levelled at the NLS for encouraging the use of text extracts rather than whole texts and for not prioritising reading for pleasure. Minns (1999) notes that the model of reading in the Literacy Hour has led to 'short-burst' reading in classrooms and a reduction in 'experience of sustained reading'; parts of texts are used to teach specific objectives and the full text is rarely read to the children. She

recommends that teachers should make time for extended reading in their lessons. Pullman (2003) examined the reading objectives in the NLS and notes that he counted 71 different verbs 'and the word *enjoy* didn't appear once' (his italic) (2003:9). He continues that to separate reading from pleasure will create a generation of children who can 'make the right noises' when they see print but 'who hate reading and feel nothing but hostility for literature' (2003:10). Thus, a significant experience associated with successful reading is that teachers use high quality reading resources in their entirety and for pleasure, rather than only for pedagogical purposes. This sustained reading includes the teacher reading to the children and the children choosing their own texts for silent sustained reading.

The use of texts in their entirety and for pleasure is supported by Frater (2001) who studied schools in which writing was taught effectively at Key Stage 2. He reports that the following reading occurs in these effective schools: a daily half hour of quiet reading for all pupils; a story read to all classes every day; and whole class study of complete texts, including texts of some length. Again, the importance of sustained reading and of using whole texts is highlighted. Frater (2001) comments that the danger of a predominant diet of incomplete texts is that children might get the impression that 'a text might be read, or even written, more for what it illustrates about techniques or forms, than for its content, purpose, meaning or pleasure' (2001:23).

Smith (1985) suggests that reading materials with which children are familiar and have been using in the outside world should be brought into the classroom. Taylor (1983) also recommends bringing functional print into classrooms; 'billboards and

flyers, letters and newspapers, price tags and street signs all have a place in classrooms' (1983:96). Ketch (1991) provides a classroom example of this; she made an alphabet book in which each letter was represented by a photograph of a sweet, drink or savoury food product. These theorists outline the importance of using print which the children read outside school in the classroom. This is one way of ensuring that reading is presented as a meaningful activity which is relevant to children's lives.

Finding high quality reading resources can be a particular problem for teachers of early successful readers. Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) consider the range of reading materials used with these readers in school and conclude that teachers should guide children's reading choices and look beyond the classroom for suitable texts. They recognise that early successful readers will require different books from those used by other children in the class, and that it can be difficult for teachers to find books which are satisfying in terms of volume of print and age-appropriate in theme. They recommend that children's classics and *Young Puffins* are suitable, and they found that teachers were using school libraries or their own collections of books to provide early readers with appropriate reading.

1.4.2 Structured teaching

A second school experience associated with successful reading is that children experience structured teaching. Scheerens (1992) outlines the following features of structured teaching: making clear what has to be learnt (formulating learning objectives), dividing teaching material into manageable units, teaching these in a well-considered sequence, using material which allows pupils to make use of hunches and

prompts, and regular testing of progress with immediate feedback (Scheerens 1992:83).

Current documentation supports teachers in providing a structured teaching programme with clear learning objectives for reading lessons; the NC and the NLS both outline a structured teaching programme for the primary school years. The NLS, for example, identifies learning objectives to be taught in each year group from Reception (age 4 years) to Year 6 (age 11 years). Of course, teachers must use this with professional discretion; for many children, their learning will not conform to the termly objectives at the 'right' time. In addition to identifying learning objectives, NLS support materials divide these objectives into units of work to be taught in particular year groups.

Having planned a structured teaching programme, it is important that this is delivered in a structured learning environment. Wragg et al (1998) note that the classrooms of effective teachers are structured environments where the children understand the set tasks, know where and how to access resources and are able to concentrate on their work. These features ensure high levels of on-task behaviour from pupils. Wray et al (2002) note that the lessons of effective literacy teachers are structured in the following ways: they have clearly focused session beginnings and conclusions, regular re-focusing of children's attention on the task in hand, regular checks on children's progress and the setting of time limits for tasks. Again, these features ensure that children work on-task during lessons.

Many theorists outline the importance of structured reading programmes starting from the knowledge, skills and understandings of reading that young children already have, particularly in the home-school transition. Wells (1986) notes that, in school, literacy experiences should be broadened from those the child already has and learning should be systematic. Clay (1991) recognises that children will be successful in school if the classroom context provides experiences which allow children to build on their current knowledge of literacy; she proposes that schools should have individual programmes which start from where each child is in his or her exploration of literacy and provide appropriate experiences to build on this existing knowledge.

1.4.3 Effective learning time

A third school experience associated with successful reading is that effective learning time is provided. A combination of whole class, group and individual teaching methods can be used to effectively manage children's learning time. Whole class, group and individual teaching all have strengths and limitations. Scheerens (1992) suggests that, regarding effective net learning time per pupil, whole class teaching can be more effective that individual teaching because with individual teaching time 'the teacher has to divide his or her attention in such a way that the net result per pupil is lower than with whole-class teaching' (1992:85). This suggests that larger amounts of time in a group with the teacher are more valuable than smaller amounts of time with the teacher on an individual basis.

The NLS offers a model of literacy teaching based around a 'Literacy Hour'. At Key Stage 1, this includes fifteen minutes of whole class shared text work; fifteen minutes of whole class focused word work; twenty minutes of group and independent work;

and a ten minute whole class plenary. It is interesting to note that these teaching methods have been developed from the work of some of the psycholinguists discussed above. Clay discusses shared and guided reading (1991:197-9) and her descriptions of the processes are very similar to those recommended in the NLS. Also, Holdaway discusses what he calls 'Shared-Book-Experience' (1979:64-5) and his description is very similar to the NLS shared reading process. In the model of literacy teaching in the NLS, then, children spend a considerable amount of time being taught as a whole class (40 minutes), some time being taught in a group (20 minutes) and no time being taught individually. It should be noted that schools are currently being encouraged to adapt the rigid time constraints of the Literacy Hour to meet children's learning needs and there is evidence that the most successful schools are doing this (Ofsted 2002, Earl et al 2003).

The NLS model incorporates modelling and scaffolding (discussed above). Through shared text work, the teacher demonstrates, or models, effective reading practices to children, and through guided text work, the teacher supports, or scaffolds, children's own attempts at reading. Wray et al (2002) note that the most effective teachers of literacy make extensive use of modelling to demonstrate what is to be produced in a lesson and the processes involved. Effective teachers provide verbal explanations of what they are doing, thus modelling thought processes to the children as they engaged in literacy activities.

The teaching methods used in the NLS can make it difficult for teachers of early successful readers to provide individual progression for these children. Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) note that the NLS includes a large quantity of whole class teaching

and that this is 'problematic when the occasional child has skills which are significantly in advance of those of the rest' (1999:161). Children in their study were up to two years ahead of their peers and this caused difficulties when the rest of the class were working as a class group on the age-appropriate termly objectives. It may be necessary, then, for early readers to have some individual teaching in order to progress in their reading development. Given the model of literacy teaching in the NLS, outlined above, it seems likely that this will have to happen outside the Literacy Hour.

1.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers have been identified. It must be acknowledged that these aspects represent trends and are not absolute; hence it is possible to have these aspects in place and not be a successful reader, and it is possible to be a successful reader and not have these aspects in place.

Regarding individual differences in children, it is interesting to observe that family background did not emerge as a significant factor in any of the studies of early readers. Of the forty-six children in Durkin's study (1966), only seven came from 'professional or upper middle-class' homes, the rest came from 'lower middle-class or lower' homes. Clark (1976) notes that 'with regard to size of family, place in family, parent's occupation and other such characteristics, these thirty-two children showed as wide a diversity as in other aspects discussed so far' (1976:40). Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) comment that, regarding the home backgrounds of their groups of YERs and NERs, there was 'more variation *within* each group than *between* each

group' (1999:30). No patterns therefore emerged regarding size of or place in family, or regarding parental occupations or levels of education. The myth that successful readers are from exclusively middle-class homes is not therefore supported by the children in these studies. The studies discussed above make very little reference to other individual differences; for example, gender or ethnicity.

Only two of the studies discussed above make comments regarding boys' reading. Clark (1976) suggests that the following factors are associated particularly with boy early readers: their reading is associated with their wider interests; they pay particular attention to environmental print (supported by studies of individual boys by Torrey 1973 and Bissex 1980); and they model their reading interests on those of their fathers. Topping (1992) suggests that the father's role may be crucial in modelling reading to boys. I hope, then, to build on Clark's and Topping's work by investigating the ways in which experiences and behaviours which are associated with young successful readers are experienced by boys.

The experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers identified in this chapter will inform the data collection and analysis in this study. They will be used to generate prompt questions for the research conversations with the boys and their parents and the observations carried out in the home settings, and the research conversations with the boys and their teachers and the observations carried out in the school setting (see Appendices 1, 2 and 5 and discussion in section 4.3.1). The literature will also contribute to the generation of categories for the analysis of the data collected on the visits to the boys' homes and to their schools (see Appendices 14 and 15 and discussion in section 4.5).

Chapter 2: Boys' reading

The previous chapter examined experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers and it was noted that reference to gender differences in this literature is limited. Since this study is concerned particularly with the reading experience of boys, this chapter will continue the investigation into young successful boy readers by discussing what is known about boy readers. Since I have been unable to find any literature on young successful boy readers, this chapter will proceed by investigating what is known generally about the reading experiences of boys. This will include what is known about boys' reading habits and how these differ from those of girls, and what is known about the effect of being a boy on reading experiences at home and at school.

2.1 Boys' reading habits

Studies of children's reading habits first appeared in Great Britain and the United States of America around the turn of this century. Subsequently, a number of large scale surveys were carried out in the USA in the 1920s (Jordan 1921, revised 1926; Terman and Lima 1925; Washburne and Vogel 1926) and in Great Britain in the 1940s (Jenkinson 1940 and Thorndike 1941). More recently, a number of studies have examined children's reading habits and identified differences in the habits of boys and girls (Leng 1968; Whitehead et al 1975, 1977; Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) 1987, 1988; Osmont and Davis 1987; Ofsted 1993; Pidgeon 1993; Benton 1995; Bunbury 1995; Millard 1997; Hall and Coles 1999). In this section, the findings from research studies will be used to examine four main areas of boys' reading habits and how these areas differ from those of girls: the quantity of books read, book

reading preferences (fiction and non-fiction), the reading of periodicals and the reading of new literacies.

2.1.1 Quantity of book reading

In research studies, sex has been identified as the most significant factor associated with the number of books children read for pleasure; at all ages boys read fewer books than girls. Jenkinson's survey (1940) was the first to highlight this finding in Great Britain. As part of his survey, he asked children aged 12 to 15 years, from secondary and senior elementary schools, how many books they read out of school. His results, indicating the number of books read per month, are as follows:

	Girls	Boys
Secondary schools	5.9-6.5	5.0-6.0
Senior elementary schools	5.1-5.3	3.9-4.3

These results show a difference in the number of books boys and girls read out of school; within each school system, the boys read fewer books than the girls. It is interesting, however, to note that boys in secondary schools read more than girls in senior elementary schools, implying that other factors are also influential. In addition, these figures are high compared with those of subsequent studies and one possible explanation for this comes from a criticism of Jenkinson's methodology; his sample focused on higher ability children and is not therefore representative of the whole population. However, it is significant to note that the trend of girls reading more than boys was first identified in Great Britain in 1940.

The next major study of children's reading habits and tastes in Great Britain was a survey carried out by Whitehead et al (1975, 1977). Children aged 10+, 12+ and 14+

were surveyed using a questionnaire which asked them to name any books they had read voluntarily over the previous month, where they had got each from and how much they liked each on a five point scale. One of the conclusions is that,

At all ages girls read more books than boys, and at the same time there are fewer non-book-readers among the girls than among the boys. (1977:273)

Whitehead et al found that the average number of books read voluntarily per month was as follows:

	10+	12+	14+	
Girls	3.28	2.48	2.15	
Boys	2.68	1.99	1.78	(1977:51)

Although these numbers are significantly less than those found by Jenkinson (1940), the trend of girls reading more than boys at each age can still be observed. In addition, a finding of great concern was that, of children who had not read a book in the previous month, the majority were boys at each age group:

	10+	12+	14+	
Girls	9.4%	23.3%	32.4%	
Boys	15.8%	33.2%	40.0%	(1977:52)

There is a trend for all children to read less as they go through adolescence; however, this is more significant for the boys than the girls, and by age 14+, a significant number of boys (40%) had not read one book for pleasure during the month prior to the survey.

More recently, Millard (1997) surveyed the reading habits and interests of 255 pupils in their first year of comprehensive schooling (aged 11-12 years). She used an open questionnaire format which asked for pupils' 'stories of reading'. One of Millard's

significant findings is that 'many more girls than boys described themselves as heavy readers' (1997:59). In addition, 9% of boys but no girls expressed an actual dislike of reading books. Although children were not asked 'how many' books they read, these findings suggest that girls read more books than boys; more girls described themselves as heavy readers and no girls recorded a dislike for reading books.

The most recent large-scale study of children's reading habits was conducted by Hall and Coles (1999). They attempted to replicate the work of Whitehead et al (1977) in order 'to provide a snapshot of children's reading at a particular moment, and to identify trends in children's reading over the period of two decades' (1999:xiv). They were thus able to identify reading habits in the late 1990s and compare them with those identified twenty years earlier. Like Whitehead et al, Hall and Coles surveyed children aged 10+, 12+ and 14+. Their findings largely concur with Whitehead et al's; that girls read more books than boys at all ages, and more boys than girls are non readers. The findings for the average number of books that had been voluntarily read in one month are as follows:

	10+	12+	14+	
Girls	3.71	2.93	2.06	
Boys	2.98	1.90	1.45	(1999:2)

When asked whether they had voluntarily read a book in the four weeks prior to the survey, 84.1% of girls and 74.5% of boys responded positively; therefore more boys (25.5%) than girls (15.9%) had not voluntarily read a book in the four weeks prior to the survey.

These studies indicate that boys read fewer books than girls and more boys are non readers than girls; this has consistently been identified, from the earliest studies in the 1940s to the most recent in the late 1990s. These trends suggest a link with boys' poorer achievements in reading compared with girls. However, it may be that boys' are weaker readers than girls because they read fewer books, or it may be that boys read fewer books than girls because they are weaker readers.

2.1.2 Book reading preferences

Two trends emerge in an analysis of the books that boys and girls enjoy reading. The first is that boys and girls choose different fiction genres to read for pleasure. The second is that boys enjoy reading non-fiction books more than girls. Indeed, Barrs (1993) states that,

> reading surveys of both children and adults for many years have pointed to the fact that females and males choose to read different kinds of material and different types of fiction. (1993:1)

As with the quantity of book reading, the sex of the child is again the most significant factor associated with book reading preferences.

One of the first studies in Great Britain to identify boys' and girls' interests in reading was conducted by Thorndike (1941). He asked children aged 8 to 16 years which books they would like to read from a list of titles with brief descriptive notes, and found that there were consistent patterns of 'boy-interests' and 'girl-interests' which cut across age and intelligence differences in his sample.

Whitehead et al (1975, 1977) examined the most widely read books. They list the most popular fiction at each age range and give the mean liking score (1-5) if the book has been read by at least 10 girls or boys. At the 10+ age group, 32 books are listed (1977:130). Of these, only 9 have a score for girls and boys and have therefore been read by at least 10 girls and 10 boys. Of the other books, 18 only have a score for girls and 5 only have a score for boys. Hence girls and boys choose different books to read for pleasure; overall, of the 32 most widely read books, 9 are read by girls and boys whereas 23 books are only read by girls or boys. This trend is repeated for the 12+ and 14+ age groups. These differences extend to the kinds of books only read by girls or boys. Whitehead et al note that most of the 18 books read only by girls have a girl or cute animal as the central character and many have fantasy themes (the five most popular are *Little Women*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Heidi*, *Five on an Adventure Island* and *The Borrowers*), whilst the 5 books read only by boys can be classified as having action and adventure plots (*Robin Hood*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Swiss Family Robinson* and *Kidnapped*).

From the whole of Whitehead et al's sample (all three age classifications) non-narrative books are named as having been read by 23.1% of boys, yet only by 6.9 % of girls. Further, 8-10% of boys mention only non-narrative books as those they have read in the previous month (1977:279). Although non-narrative books are therefore not as popular as narratives, these results clearly show that the boys in this study enjoy non-narrative books more than girls and that some boys only read non-narrative books when reading for pleasure.

From 1979 to 1983, surveys of Language Performance in Schools were carried out by the APU. Their findings are summarised by the APU (1987, 1988) and conclude that, at age 11 years, girls 'expressed an interest in pony stories' and boys had a 'greater interest in animal stories and adventure stories' (1987:8). More specifically, in the 1983 primary survey, children were asked to name their favourite authors. Three authors are mentioned by both boys and girls: Enid Blyton, C.S. Lewis and Roald Dahl. Apart from these, boys and girls chose different authors. The trend of girls and boys reading different fiction texts for pleasure is therefore a significant finding of the survey. The APU also report that boys enjoy non-narrative texts more than girls; among pupils aged 11 years,

> It was a consistent finding that a significantly higher proportion of boys than girls enjoyed reading works related to hobbies or which involved finding out how things worked (1988:171).

This work supports that of Clark (1976) who, in her study of early readers, notes that the boys' reading is associated with their other interests.

In 1993, Ofsted published a report of HMI inspections of boys' work in English in secondary schools. These were carried out over a three year period, from 1988 to 1991, in the course of normal inspection activities. In a section on voluntary reading, Ofsted note that there are differences in boys' and girls' reading tastes,

> Preferred topics mentioned by boys included horror, science fiction, fantasy, adventure, football, fishing and computers. ... Most girls demonstrated very different preferences from boys, except possibly where adventure books or books dealing with strange and unusual events were concerned. (1993 para.37)

The trend for boys and girls to read different texts for pleasure is identified once again, although adventure stories are shown to appeal to both girls and boys. The number of books taken out of a school library over a three day period is as follows:

	Fiction	Non-fiction	Total	
Boys	33	31	64	
Girls	58	21	79	(1993 para.112)

This data concurs with the trend that boys read more non-narrative texts than girls. Although girls borrowed more books overall, boys borrowed more non-fiction books than girls and this data shows that the preference for boys to read more non-narrative texts than girls is continuing into the 1990s. Ofsted report that fiction makes up 51.5% of boys' reading and non-fiction 48.5%, and that fiction makes up 73.5% of girls' reading and non-fiction 26.5%. Non-narrative reading therefore makes up almost a half of the boys' reading, and only just over a quarter of the girls' reading.

Millard (1997) identifies preferred genres and authors selected by boys and girls, aged 11-12 years, in her survey. Genres selected by at least 5% of boys are adventure/action (33%), comedy/humour (6%) and science fiction (5.3%). This indicates a clear dominance of the action/adventure genre, although it should be noted that the largest group (48%) do not name a favourite genre at all. Genres chosen by at least 5% of girls are point horror (14%), adventure (9.1%), funny/joke (7.4%), school (6.6%), teenage fiction (5.8%), children's classics (5.8%) and ghost (5%). Again, the largest group (29%) do not name a favourite. From these choices, adventure and comedy feature in both girls' and boys' favourites, while science fiction only appears in the boys' list and point horror, school, teenage fiction, children's classics and ghost only appear in the girls' list. Differences in girls' and boys' preferred genres can

therefore be observed in Millard's results; however, adventure (also identified by Ofsted 1993) and humour are identified as genres that can appeal to both girls and boys.

This trend continues in the preferred author lists. Millard identifies preferred authors (1997:54-5); the boys have eight and the girls have thirteen. From these, the only authors on both lists are Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl (two of the three identified by the APU 1987 as appealing to both boys and girls). However, Millard notes that even where common authors are identified, different titles are given as preferences. From Roald Dahl titles, the girls preferred *Matilda*, *BFG* and *Revolting Rhymes*, in which the main characters are girls, while the boys preferred *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Danny Champion of the World* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, in which the main characters are boys (and one wily fox), and *Boy* and *Solo*, both being autobiographical works. This suggests that girls prefer reading books about girls and boys prefer reading books about boys.

The most recent research findings are those of Hall and Coles (1999) who identify which genres have been read by boys and girls in the four weeks prior to their survey. The data shows that the three most popular genres for boys are adventure (39.5%), science fiction/fantasy (16.7%), and horror/ghost (16.3%), whilst the three most popular genres for girls are adventure (45.7%), romance/relationships (31.9%), and horror/ghost (25.9%). These recent findings concur with those of Ofsted (1993) and Millard (1997); adventure is a popular genre with both boys and girls. Discussing preferred genres, Hall and Coles comment that 'there are significant differences in the types of books chosen by boys and girls' (1999:74). They classified books into eleven

different genres and found that, as a proportion of their total reading diet, boys read comparatively more science fiction/fantasy, comedy/joke/annuals/humour, sports-related and war/spy related texts than girls, the greatest difference being in sports-related texts. Girls read more adventure, horror/ghost, romance/relationships, animal related, school related and poetry texts than boys, the greatest difference being in romance/relationships texts. The only genre relatively evenly balanced in boys' and girls' reading diets is crime/detective. Regarding specific titles/series, Hall and Coles found that Roald Dahl books are 'extraordinarily popular' with boys and girls, and again Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton feature in boys' and girls' favourite fiction books (concurring with APU 1987 and Millard 1997).

Regarding non-fiction, Hall and Coles' findings indicate that boys are more interested in reading narrative than non-fiction texts. On the list of favourite titles and series amongst ten year old boys, only two non-fiction titles appear; *The Guinness Book of Records* and dinosaur books (various). Hall and Coles note that only a very small number of their total sample read only non-fiction texts (2.8%); however, of this group, the majority was boys (78%). Summarising their findings amongst the ten year olds, Hall and Coles state:

> The commonly held assumption that boys of this age are more interested in
>
> non-fiction than narrative is not supported by these findings. (1999:49)

It is not clear where this 'commonly held assumption' derives from since the studies considered above (Whitehead at al 1977, Ofsted 1993) report the same findings as Hall and Coles; although boys read more non-fiction texts than girls, boys read more fiction than non-fiction texts. Overall then, boys prefer fiction to non-fiction texts;

however, of the small number of children who read only non-fiction texts, the majority are boys.

These studies have clearly shown the predominance of the two trends identified above; boys and girls prefer different fiction texts (although there is some overlap with adventure and humour genres and with the authors Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton), and boys enjoy non-fiction texts more than girls. Boys' preferred fiction genres are action/adventure, comedy/humour, science fiction/fantasy and horror/ghost fiction and their non-fiction reading is associated with their wider interests.

2.1.3 Periodical reading

It is important to consider children's reading of periodicals, as well as their book reading, because this constitutes a significant part of some children's reading diet. A large number of special interest periodicals are published and marketed to children; for example, those on a range of sporting interests, computers, and characters from popular culture. Davies and Brember (1993) asked 611 children in Years 2, 4, and 6 (aged 7, 9 and 11 years) about their reading habits, asking them to choose between stories, comics and non-fiction as their favourite reading material. For both girls and boys, stories were the first choice, followed by comics as a second choice. The authors therefore suggest that comics are a significant factor in the home reading diet of both boys and girls in the primary school years.

Millard (1997) notes that sex differences in periodical reading are even more marked than for book reading. She found that by the age of 11 years, few children in her survey were regular readers of comics; however, those who did continue to read a

comic regularly were overwhelmingly boys. Further, there was a small group of boys whose reading diet consisted solely of comics (6.7 per cent); no girls fell into this category. For the reading of magazines, Millard notes that,

> The most striking feature of magazine reading is that it divides so neatly down gender lines. Girls overwhelmingly choose to read magazines with features about boys and relationships; boys choose to read about football and computers. (1997:65)

Indeed, the reading of one group of boys was dominated by football magazines 'almost to the exclusion of anything else' (1997:58).

As part of Hall and Coles' (1999) survey, children were asked about the comics, magazines and newspapers they read regularly. They found that girls were more likely to buy magazines, whereas boys were more likely to buy comics and newspapers. Their survey concurs with Millard's findings that boys and girls read different periodical titles. Those read by over 10 per cent of boys were *The Beano* (19.4%), *Match* (18.1%), *The Sun* (17.7%), *Shoot* (17.0%), 'Computer magazines' (10.8%) and *The Dandy* (10.4%); two comics, two football magazines, computer magazines and a tabloid newspaper. Eight periodicals were read by over 10 per cent of girls; however, only one of these, *The Sun*, was also on the boys' list. (It should be noted that, despite *The Sun* appearing in boys' and girls' reading, they may read different articles and features in the newspaper.) Like Millard, Hall and Coles (2001) note the significance of boys' football magazines. They comment that boys 'share a reading diet of sometimes rather dense statistical and biographical information about football and footballers, league tables, transfer fees' (2001:217). From their football magazine reading, boys share statistical and biographical information with each other, thus

sharing a common discourse. Hall and Coles conclude that periodical reading is 'a very important element in children's reading diet' (1999:61).

The use of comics in schools is generally restricted to wet dinnertimes, and they are provided by dinner supervisors to keep children amused and well behaved (Bromley 2000); they are rarely used in the formal reading curriculum. Bromley (2000), however, recognises the potential value of comics as reading resources and introduces comics into the book corner of her Reception classroom. She notes that 'children who had not previously spent much time in the Book Corner began to do so, particularly boys' (2000:36). This work indicates that comics are a reading resource which are particularly enjoyed by young boys.

Millard and Marsh (2000) set up a home-school comic lending library in a primary school (two Reception/Year 1 classes and one Year 3 class) and note that one of the benefits was that male family members were clearly involved; they received many positive comments from dads. They comment that this appears to be a genre for which male family members demonstrate a natural enthusiasm (Marsh and Millard 2000). The authors conclude that, regarding the reading of comics,

> This form of popular culture has a particular appeal in that it is also able to
> draw in non-traditional support for literacy development, including the
> engagement of dads and older male siblings in the pleasure of a well-loved
> text. (Marsh and Millard 2000:117)

Comic reading is regarded as something that boys, their fathers and their older male siblings can engage in and enjoy together. It may also be a slightly subversive type of

reading which is enjoyed by boys and men and which, as noted above, is absent from the formal school reading curriculum.

Boys, then, enjoy reading comics, magazines and newspapers. Their magazine reading focuses on football and computers, and it has been suggested that comic reading is something that male family members enjoy together.

2.1.4 New literacies

Before leaving this section it is necessary to consider 'new literacies' because they have been making an increasing impact on children's reading experiences. Advances in ICT have made a new range of literacies available to children, including literacies associated with computer games, the internet, digital television, e-mail communication and mobile phone text-messaging. These now make up a significant part of some children's literacy experiences, and they require new reading skills, in addition to traditional ones. Reading on-screen is different to reading a book and therefore requires different skills to be learned; for example, scrolling up and down, navigating by clicking on icons, and using hyperlinks. Kress and van Leeuwin (1996) note that, in addition to reading print, new technologies require children to read 'the language of the screen', which includes visual images; they have to learn to make meaning from signs, symbols and images which are presented on screen and, unlike a book, are read in a non-linear way. These texts now make up a significant part of some children's literacy experiences, and research suggests that boys have a greater interest in them than girls.

Reynolds (1994) asked children 'If you had a choice, which one of these things would you do? Play a new computer game, read a really good book or watch television?' The results were markedly different for girls and boys:

	Boys	Girls
Play a new computer game	48.99%	20.35%
Read a really good book	16.78%	42.44%
Watch television	24.16%	34.88%

Amongst boys, playing a new computer game was the most popular choice and reading a book was the least popular. Amongst girls the opposite results were found; reading a book was the most popular choice and playing a new computer game was the least popular.

Millard (1997) asked the children in her survey 'What computer games do you enjoy and how long do you play on your computer each day?' The results indicate striking differences between girls and boys. Millard summarises,

> The boys in the study were by far the heaviest users of computer games with over half of them playing on a computer for longer than an hour each day ... almost half the girls either did not play computer games at all or described themselves as being very infrequent users (1997:69).

Again it appears that boys have the greater interest in using computers. In addition, boys and girls had different types of favourite games. Millard categorises computer games into genres, finding that girls prefer the 'less violent, more quest-based formats of the platform game, in which the goal is usually to get to a particular area of a building to retrieve treasure or rescue a prisoner' and boys prefer the 'quicker paced, more violent 'beat 'em ups', with the subset 'shoot 'em ups' being especially popular'

(1997:71-2). Millard comments that these games do not require much on-screen reading; however, many boys reported reading computer magazines to support their interest.

Hall and Coles (1999) found that twice as many boys as girls reported using a computer during the evening prior to their survey (58.6 per cent boys compared with 29.4 per cent girls). These children were asked to specify how much time they had spent on it, and boys claimed to spend longer on the computer; 10.1% of boys compared with 2% of girls claimed to have spent at least two and a half hours on the computer. An interesting point noted by Hall and Coles is that there was 'no significant relationship between children's reported use of a computer and whether or not they had been reading that evening' (1999:128). This suggests that the concern that computer use adversely affects reading might be unfounded.

Boys, then, spend more time on computers than girls. Whilst not all of their activities on the computer involve reading text, their interest in computers does impact on their reading. They are learning to read 'the language of the screen' and they support their interest by reading computer-related materials; for example, magazines and game instructions.

2.2 Boys' reading at home

In the previous chapter, the home was recognised to be highly significant in terms of children's reading success. This section will outline what has been said in the literature about the reading experiences of boys in the home. It will be seen that negative aspects dominate the literature; parents have lower expectations of boys than

of girls as readers, and boys see reading in the home as being predominantly linked to a female identity. It has been recognised that boys need to see their fathers reading and that siblings can act as powerful role models to boys.

2.2.1 Parental expectation

Hodgeon (1993) interviewed parents, mainly mothers, about differences in girls' and boys' reading. These parents believed that girls were more suited to reading activities than boys. They noted that girls engaged in more 'secretarial pursuits' whilst boys wanted to play 'rough and naughty and boisterous' games outside. Hodgeon concludes that the parents in her study had particular expectations of girls and boys as readers; they expected girls to be better readers than boys. This is significant since this expectation sets in motion the 'self-fulfilling prophesy' that girls will become better readers and boys will not achieve as highly in reading because this is what is expected of them. If parents expect girls to be better readers, their behaviour may reinforce this in subtle ways; for example, buying literacy materials as presents for girls more frequently than for boys, and engaging in literacy activities with girls more frequently than with boys.

Nichols (2002) interviewed Australian parents, both mothers and fathers, and analysed the interviews using critical discourse analysis. She concludes that parents associate literacy with feminine personality types, regard girls as being developmentally advanced in literacy-related areas such as speech and direct girls' early learning. This results in girls' literacy learning being regarded as 'natural and unproblematic' (2002:141). In contrast, parents recognise an opposition between masculinity and literacy, expect boys to be developmentally delayed and allow boys

to decide when they are ready to learn. This results in boys' literacy learning being regarded as 'problematic' (2002:141). Again, parents have higher expectations of girls than of boys as literacy learners.

This research indicates a negative influence on boys' reading achievements. If parents have higher expectations of girls than of boys as readers and literacy learners, then this is likely to result in boys' poorer performance.

2.2.2 Role models

In the previous chapter, the importance of reading being modeled in the home was recognised. This section will explore gender aspects of this modeling process.

Millard (1997) was surprised by the degree of influence the home had on children's attitudes to reading. She comments, 'I became more and more conscious of the continuing influence of the home in shaping pupils' orientation towards reading in school' (1997:1). Millard shows that parents act as 'powerful models of literacy users' for children. In addition to providing literacy materials for children, they show them how to use literacy effectively, or 'how to be literate within particular social contexts' (1997:77-8); for example, children learn from watching their parents' literacy practices and then trying these out for themselves. Children observe who reads and writes and what the nature of these experiences are; for example, who reads fiction/non-fiction, and who writes letters/cheques/shopping lists. In these observations, children notice which activities are usually carried out by men and which by women, and this influences their learning of gendered reading behaviour.

Exploring the effect of the home on children's reading development, Millard asked children who had been most helpful in teaching them to read. In addition to the teacher, mothers were mentioned as the key influence in the early stages of learning to read. Where fathers were mentioned it was usually in the category of 'parents'; they were rarely singled out individually (1997:81). When asked who read most in their family, children mentioned the female members most often. 'Mum' and 'sister' were the most popular categories, followed by 'father'. 'Grandma' was mentioned, but not 'granddad'. Millard summarises,

> The image of reading in the home then, through the eyes of both sexes is of an activity associated closely with the women members of the family. (1997:83)

The children in Millard's survey regard reading as a female, rather than male, activity in the home.

Hall and Coles (1999) asked children to list who they live with and to indicate whether they thought those family members read a lot. More than half of the children (56.8 per cent) identified a female adult, usually a mother, who reads a lot, whereas only 38.2 per cent named a male adult, usually a father, who reads a lot. This work supports the view that children see reading in the home as a female-dominated practice.

This research indicates a negative influence on boys' reading performance. If boys see reading in the home as linked to a female identity, this is likely to have a negative effect on their reading development. In order to overcome this negative aspect, boys need to see male family members reading in the home.

2.2.2.1 Fathers as role models

The importance of boys seeing their fathers reading and the influence of fathers' reading practices on their sons' reading lives have been discussed by a number of theorists.

In Clark's (1976) study of early readers, she notes that both mothers and fathers are actively involved in their children's reading. Both parents read to the children, are interested in their education and are concerned for their future. Clark observes, however, that fathers are particularly important in boys' reading:

> a number of the boys particularly were already modelling their speech and
>
> their interests on those of their father. (1976:97)

The boys were clearly using their fathers as role models and learning gendered behaviour from them.

Topping (1992) discusses the 'particularly crucial' role of fathers in modelling to their sons, and Minns (1990) provides examples of this modelling in her study of five children's early reading experiences. Three of these children were boys and Minns identifies ways in which two of them show patterns of reading behaviour similar to that of their fathers (the third one lived with his mother and sister). One boy, Gurdeep, even models the controlling manner of his father's reading behaviour when he reads to another child in school:

> Although Gurdeep's father is patient and polite [when reading with his son],
>
> he seems uncomfortable when Gurdeep takes control by moving too far from
>
> the text and initiating more of a conversation than his father can handle. ...
>
> perhaps Gurdeep is modelling himself on his father when he retells *Where the*

Wild Things Are to his classmate Simon. He is interested in sharing the enjoyment of the story with Simon, but clearly wants to hold on to the telling. (1990:15-6)

Gurdeep models his father's behaviour by keeping control of the story-telling and discouraging Simon's interventions. Another boy, Reid, reads his brother's and father's natural history texts. He is clearly modelling his reading on the males in his family; there is no record of him reading his sister's or mother's reading material. It may also be significant that Reid's father can remember his own father reading stories to him:

'Dad was mad on telling me stories. I can remember always getting told a story,' he says, and now he reads or tells a bedtime story to Reid and Amber every night. (1990:65)

Reid's father is taking a male reading event into a third generation; his father read stories to him and now he reads stories to his children.

Minns (1993) continues this discussion in a later piece of work. She again found that boys' reading behaviour imitates their fathers' particular reading styles and preferences. Minns examined the reading of three boys, aged ten years, and found that their views of their fathers as readers were closely associated with the kinds of readers they were becoming. Minns argues that:

Teaching a boy to become a reader, and to remain a reader, involves helping him to develop a reading identity that offers him a way of being male, and which at the same time encourages him to develop a personal response – possibly at the risk of being different. (1993:71)

The idea that boys need to develop 'a reading identity' which offers 'a way of being male' will be central to the data analysis in this study and discussion below will develop this idea further (section 2.4).

Love and Hamston (2001) studied adolescent boys identified as committed readers and note that the boys' fathers support their reading practices, and further that,

> The father was not only the person who provided the model for reading
> content and purpose but also became the person with whom the reading was
> discussed. (2001:42)

The authors note that boys imitate their fathers' reading practices and that they talk about their reading with their fathers. Love and Hamston believe that these conversations help the boys understand the shared masculine interest area and also help to shape the boys' understanding of the world. This includes understanding the place of reading in the masculine world.

The importance of fathers becoming involved in their children's reading development, particularly that of their sons, has been highlighted by the government. The QCA (1998) recognise that children, especially boys, need positive role models; they need to see men reading:

> The involvement of parents, particularly fathers, in their children's
> development is important. The predominance of female staff in early years
> classrooms means that boys have few models (1998:49)

Most early years and primary school staff are women and it may be particularly important that fathers are involved in reading so that it is not seen as predominantly a female activity. In spite of the government's concern, little research has been carried

out into the gendered nature of children's early reading experiences at home, and especially the role of male family members in young boys' reading. The work of Minns is the only work I have found which includes empirical data on this area.

The literature suggests, then, that boys need to see their fathers reading; however, research discussed above (section 2.2.2) suggests that, for many boys, this is not a frequent occurrence.

2.2.2.2 Siblings as role models

It has also been suggested that siblings can have a positive impact on boys' reading.

Gregory (2001) notes that studies of family involvement in children's literacy development have always emphasised the role of parents. In this piece of research, Gregory is interested in how family members other than parents initiate young children into literacy. Gregory found much sibling interaction occurring around literacy activities; however, she makes no comment regarding the gendered nature of these practices.

Hall and Coles (1999) do identify a gender element in sibling influence on reading practices; they found that living with a sibling who reads a lot has an influence on boys. Indeed, boys in this study were influenced more by their siblings, both brothers and sisters, than by their parents. Hall and Coles discovered that,

> Boys who live with another child who reads a lot do have a more positive view of themselves as readers than boys who do not ... The sex of the sibling who reads a lot is not relevant to this finding. (1999:101)

Boys are more positive about reading when they live with another child who is a frequent reader, whether the child is a brother or a sister.

There is little research, then, on the effects of siblings as role models; however, one study suggests that boys have a more positive view of themselves as readers if they live with siblings who are frequent readers.

2.3 Boys' reading at school

In this section, the literature on the reading experiences of boys in school will be discussed. A significant factor in young boys' underachievement is believed to be the 'feminisation of primary schools' (Skelton 2001:35). This includes factors such as day-to-day routines and practices favouring girls, teachers holding lower expectations of boys, a dominance of female teachers, and curriculum delivery and assessment favouring girls' learning styles. In this section, factors which are particularly relevant to reading will be discussed. This will include peer pressure on boys not to achieve highly in 'female' subjects such as reading, the relationship between boys' preferred learning styles and current classroom practice in reading lessons, and reading resources in the classroom favouring girls' preferences. The discussion will also consider literature which suggests ways in which these negative aspects can be overcome.

2.3.1 Peer pressure

Boys may be under pressure from other boys to appear to do little or no work and this is exacerbated in their reading lives since boys frequently associate the act of reading with a feminine identity.

Noble (1998) believes that what he calls an 'anti-swot culture' begins in the lower end
of the primary school:

> In some primary schools there is a discernible and even anti-swot, culture by
>
> the age of seven. Whatever confusion boys may be feeling about what it is like
>
> to be a boy and what their role should be, many define themselves as being
>
> different from girls. Girls quite obviously work, *ergo* boys do not work. ... It
>
> is critical that schools challenge 'anti-swotism' both pro-actively and
>
> reactively, and at the same time reinforce the work ethic. (1998:28)

Noble suggests that boys do not work in an attempt to define themselves as different

from girls. Epstein (1998) discusses this pressure on boys:

> Among school students, the 'superman' does not include 'Clark Kent'. The
>
> main demand on boys from within their peer culture (but also, sometimes,
>
> from teachers), ... is to appear to do little or no work, to be heavily
>
> competitive (but at sport and heterosex, not school work), to be rough, tough
>
> and dangerous to know. (1998:106)

Epstein also notes that boys who are seen to work are abused and bullied in both

primary and secondary schools. Since working hard is regarded as feminine, these

boys are seen as feminised and the abuse often focuses on misogynic and homophobic

name-calling. Phoenix (1998) reports that boys who are clever are not only unpopular

with their peers, but are not seen as masculine. To be regarded as masculine, boys

have to be good at sport, particularly football, and have to be seen not to work. Boys'

achievements in all curriculum areas are negatively affected in a climate where they

are under pressure from their peers not to work hard. However, their achievements in

reading are particularly affected given that reading is associated with a feminine, rather than a masculine, identity.

Ofsted (1993) acknowledge that these social and cultural pressures create attitudes to reading which are less positive for boys than for girls. In their report, *Boys and English*, they state that boys' attainment in English is marked,

> by a persistent vein of low achievement, which is in turn associated with attitudes to writing and reading which are less positive than girls'. No doubt social and cultural pressures help to create these attitudes. (1993 para.120)

Ofsted make a clear link between social and cultural pressures, negative attitudes to literacy and subsequent low achievement amongst boys. Klein (1997) discusses why boys fall behind in reading and cites a report which links boys' underachievement in reading with social pressure and the acquisition of masculinity. The evidence suggests that the social pressure from the peer group not to work hard is greater for boys than for girls. When it comes to reading and the development of a gendered identity, the message seems to be that reading is compatible with a feminine identity but not with a masculine one. Klein summarises the situation when she notes that 'real boys don't read books' (1997:2). The QCA (1998) refers to this social pressure as a 'culture' in its own right:

> Although boys recognise the importance of academic success, there is a culture which acts as a powerful deterrent to hard work or enthusiasm. Boys gain little credibility among their peers by working hard or being seen to be successful, particularly in English. (1998:12)

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) show that boys regard English as a 'girls' subject' and that there seems to be 'an abrasive rub between boys, literacy and schooling' (1998:197).

This presents a clear barrier to boys' achievements in reading; to work hard and to achieve may mean the loss of friends. Many boys may therefore be placed in a position of choosing whether to work hard and do well in literacy or whether to be popular with their peers.

It should also be noted that peers influence children's reading choices and habits. Whilst it has been well documented that girls recommend books to each other and swap books to read, Hall and Coles (1999) suggest that this is also the case with boys:

> Boys in particular were clear that friends have the same taste and share the same interests and that therefore their judgements could be trusted.
> (1999:102-3)

Moss and Attar (1999) note that, for boys, books can become 'status objects or the focus around which they do status politics' (1999:143). In some instances, therefore, particularly when the subject matter is based on a shared interest, boys do recommend books to each other and books can become valued objects to be desired.

It is interesting to consider what schools and teachers can do to help boys in this area. Minns (1993) shows that boys need help in establishing a male identity which allows them to be a reader and to be masculine. This was considered particularly in the home context; however, it is equally important in the school context, and teachers can help boys with this. The QCA (1998) acknowledges that whilst attitudes towards learning, literacy and behaviour among boys are influenced by powerful cultural forces that are often beyond the control of teachers, schools can nevertheless make a difference because 'teachers have a major influence on the attitudes, success or failure of their pupils' (1998:8). The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) is actively encouraging men

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into teaching, particularly in the primary years. Other strategies for dealing with boys' attitudes centre on ways of encouraging boys to think that 'reading is cool'. Mentoring schemes have been suggested; the QCA (1998) states that these can be 'particularly helpful to combat the lack of value placed on academic success in boys' culture' (1998:47). In such schemes, male role models are provided for boys; for example, men from the community go into schools to read with boys. The National Literacy Trust has produced a set of posters which show some of the England football team reading for pleasure. Such strategies and initiatives are designed to help boys see reading as a positive and masculine activity.

This research indicates a negative influence on boys' reading performance. Boys are less likely to achieve highly in reading if they are under pressure to be seen to do little or no work, and if achieving highly will make them unpopular with their peers.

2.3.2 Boys' preferred learning styles

Considerable research has been conducted into the differences between the ways in which boys and girls behave in the classroom. Despite the statutory requirements of inclusion and equality, research shows that boys dominate the classroom space and the teacher time; for example, boys talk more than girls, take up the front and central positions in the classroom, and take up more of the teacher's attention (Baxter 2001). Differences in learning styles have also been identified; for example, boys prefer experiential learning styles, physical involvement in learning activities, have positive attitudes to short term goals and immediate rewards, and are less comfortable at being reflective learners (Mitchell 2000).

It is interesting to compare boys' preferred learning styles with current practice in the teaching of reading. Teaching methods utilised in the Literacy Hour are outlined in the previous chapter and theorists have identified strengths and limitations of this practice for boys. Frater (2000) conducted a survey of effective practice and comments,

> Teachers often reported that the structure of the hour seemed to offer special benefits for boys; these appear to lie in the lesson's manageable blocks of time, in having clear objectives for each session, and in the explicit teaching of skills and strategies that is customarily involved. (2000:15)

The dividing of the hour into shorter parts, having clear learning objectives and explicit teaching are therefore believed to support some aspects of boys' learning styles. Hall and Coles (2001) note that the structured pattern of whole-class, group and individual teaching is 'perceived as particularly supportive of boys' development' (2001:231).

It has, however, also been reported that the Literacy Hour may not offer boys the 'active, hands-on learning experience that they prefer'; children are predominantly passive for long periods during the Literacy Hour and this poses 'particular difficulties for physically active boys' (Budge 2000:27).

The situation in school regarding the teaching of reading and boys' learning styles, therefore, is not conclusive; some aspects appear to support boys' learning styles whilst others appear not to.

2.3.3 Resources for reading

It has been suggested that the resources used for reading in school are closer to girls' reading preferences than boys'.

Over twenty years ago, Clark (1976) noted that the girls in her study were more content with the kind of texts they were given in school than the boys. She found that boys' reading included non-narrative texts and that their narrative reading consisted of short stories, whilst girls' reading focused on the narrative and consisted of extended stories. Since the school reading curriculum at the time focused on extended narrative stories, it was more compatible with the girls' preferences than with the boys'. One year later, Whitehead et al (1977), in their survey of children's reading interests, recommended that secondary schools should make more use of non-narrative texts in class and school libraries and encourage boys to read these for pleasure. They recommended that these texts should be at a suitable level of difficulty and should include interest areas beyond the school curriculum. By including such non-narrative texts, Whitehead et al argued that schools could ensure that their reading curriculum included books which many boys particularly enjoyed reading. A decade later, Osmont and Davis (1987) still found that school texts were closer to those the girls read at home for pleasure than those of the boys:

> girls on the whole liked the books available at school, and said they were
> similar to those they had at home. Boys were less happy with the books
> available and said that their home reading was different from the reading they
> engaged in at school. (in Barrs and Pidgeon 1998:3)

The choice of 'girl-friendly' texts at school gives girls two advantages; as well as enjoying the books more, they will gain more practice with the texts they read and are

assessed on in school. Thus it might be expected that their school reading attainment will be higher than that of the boys.

In the National Curriculum, first implemented in 1988, a wide range of literature and non-fiction and non-literary texts are specified for use in the classroom at Key Stage 1 (DfEE/QCA 1999:47) and Key Stage 2 (DfEE/QCA 1999:54-5). Since this is a statutory document, it might have been expected that this would ensure that a wider range of texts was used in the classroom. However, this appears not to be the case; researchers since 1988 are still finding that reading resources are not adequately catering for boys' interests. Millard (1997) recognises that there is 'less provision for boys to exercise their reading interests within the school environment' (1997:13), and recommends that teachers should broaden the selection of the fiction texts they use in the classroom, to include 'narratives which emphasise action and plot rather than 'knowledge of the human heart'' (1997:161). Texts, she argues, should include genres that appeal to boys. It was noted above that boys prefer action and adventure in their fiction reading and Millard therefore recommends that these themes are included in the school reading curriculum. Millard (1997) also argues that 'it is boys' need to establish a masculine identity ... that creates the greatest barrier to equal access to literacy as it is currently presented in the curriculum' (1997:29), and she therefore recommends that the reading curriculum should use resources which boys value, in order to raise the status of reading; for example, if boys are seen to achieve highly on computers, they may be admired and their popularity with other boys might not be threatened.

Most recently, it has been argued that reading resources in the classroom should be broadened beyond those specified in the National Curriculum and should include 'vernacular literacies'; these literacies cover the range of reading children engage in out of school, including reading associated with popular culture. Marsh and Millard (2000) argue that the literacy development of all children would be enhanced if the social and cultural world of children is recognised and 'allowed to creep under the classroom door' (2000:125). Arguing for the use of popular culture in the classroom, Marsh and Millard recommend that children should 'have a voice in shaping the social practices of schooled literacy' (2000:192). This would ensure that all children's literacy interests, those of both boys and girls, would be valued in the classroom environment. Hall and Coles (2001, and Coles and Hall 2002) argue for the inclusion of vernacular literacies as school resources and suggest that this would broaden the school literacy curriculum beyond its current emphasis on the narrative 'with its tentative nods in the direction of non-fiction, media and computer literacies' (2001:219). Hall and Coles outline differences in boys' and girls' vernacular non-book reading: boys' reading of sports magazines 'tends to lead to an analysis of information, swapping facts and figures, scores and club histories'; girls' magazine reading 'tends to lead to consideration of life stories, and analysis of motivation and character' (2001:218). Their research again shows that girls adapt to the school reading curriculum better than boys because 'it matches their tastes and habits and school literacy practices mirror their vernacular practices' (2001:218). Hall and Coles make a direct link between boys' underachievement and the fact that their vernacular literacies are not represented in the school reading curriculum. They argue powerfully that the differences between school literacy practices and boys' vernacular literacies

affect boys' motivation and attainment in school-based reading and are problematised as boys' underachievement.

Boys' reading preferences were discussed above and a large amount of their preferred reading can be classified as 'vernacular' and rarely appears in the formal reading curriculum. This includes texts on male hobbies (for example, football, fishing, computers), joke books, annuals, comics, football and computer magazines, tabloid newspapers, on-screen reading, and computer game instructions.

There is, then, a clear link between the texts which are used in the classroom and reading achievement. Barrs (1993) argues that a reading curriculum that takes account of boys' interests, i.e. with the focus on non-narrative books, might result in different views of girls' and boys' relative strengths as readers. She argues:

> It has been clear for a long time now that this kind of reading is given less attention in primary schools, is less carefully recorded and supported, and that less thought is generally given to what constitutes progress and development in non-fiction reading. Our views of girls' and boys' relative strengths as readers might be altered in the context of a reading curriculum which took more carefully into account boys' reading interests, and set out to develop them. (1993:10)

Barrs pursues this theme in a more recent publication, arguing that 'girls … could be seen as underachieving in relation to the reading of information texts' (1998:3). This point is critical since it highlights the fact that differences in reading attainment are related to that which is assessed. If assessment of the reading curriculum focuses on a narrow aspect of reading which happens to interest girls more than boys, it would be

expected that girls would be the higher achievers. Like Barrs (1993), Hall and Coles (2001) recognise that if school literacy is broadened to include a wider range of reading, boys may be seen to do well in the school curriculum. In the current climate, with its emphasis on narrative fiction reading, girls' vernacular literacies equip them for school literacy better than boys'. In an alternative curriculum, which includes taking from text and analysing information, boys' vernacular literacies would equip them well and they would be seen to be successful readers.

The government has responded to the concerns raised above; a number of recommendations are made in a document on raising boys' achievements in literacy (QCA 1998). The QCA recommends the use of non-fiction texts to improve boys' efficiency and enthusiasm as readers (1998:19) and the use of computers; since boys are interested in computers, the differences in reading paper and screen texts could perhaps be explored and exploited (1998:18). The QCA do not however suggest that traditional work based on fiction texts should be neglected or abandoned altogether, but that it should not have the highest status that it has always had in the English curriculum:

> This is not to suggest that boys should be exempt from reading narrative or talking about characters, but if these are the areas of the reading curriculum which have the highest status, and the reading boys enjoy is marginal to school English, then boys' progress in reading and writing may be affected from the early stages. (1998:18)

They acknowledge that boys will not perform well if the reading which has status at school and the reading they enjoy are different. The QCA also recommends that teachers should consider what boys read out of school when planning the English

curriculum (1998:19). Most recently, through the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998), the DfEE has specified, in greater detail than in the National Curriculum, a wide range of fiction, poetry and non-fiction texts to be used in primary classrooms. Further, the standardised assessment tasks/tests (SATs), which are used to assess children's reading attainment, now include both fiction and non-fiction texts.

To summarise, this section has outlined how boys' reading achievements can be negatively affected when schools use reading resources which do not match boys' reading preferences and do not take into account the vernacular reading in which boys engage outside school.

2.4 Reading and the masculine identity

Finally, in this discussion of boys' reading, I want to reflect upon the relationship between reading and the masculine identity since this will be critical to the data analysis in this study. The literature which has been discussed in this chapter has largely considered the relationship between reading and the masculine identity a negative one; that, fundamentally, being a boy has a negative impact on reading. The work discussed in this section will highlight the possibility that for some boys the relationship between reading and the masculine identity can be a positive one.

Traditionally, gender has been constructed as binary categories (masculine and feminine) which are in opposition to each other. Hence, attributes are seen as belonging to either the masculine or the feminine. Where binary categories are in opposition to other, one is usually regarded as dominant and one as subordinate. Traditionally, feminist discourse has highlighted how, in Western society, the

masculine is dominant and the feminine subordinate. Particularly over the last thirty years, feminists have written about how traditional gender roles have worked to suppress women in the home and in the workplace, and how girls have been disadvantaged at school.

In post-structural feminist discourse, however, notions of binaries are deconstructed and notions of multiples are given credence; hence, the notion of 'masculinity' is reconstructed as 'masculinities'. This plural form recognises that there are many forms of masculinity. There are multiple ways of being male which are constructed in different social, cultural and historical contexts and are not fixed; rather, they develop and change over time. Gender is considered to be relational, rather than oppositional; masculine and feminine are constructed in relation to each other. Further, different versions of masculinity are also constructed in relation to each other. Connell (1995, 2000) recognises that where there are multiple masculinities, some will be dominant and some subordinate or marginalised. Connell (1995) identifies three broad categories of masculinities: 'hegemonic' which are the 'dominant and dominating modes of masculinity which claim the highest status and exercise the greatest influence and authority'; 'complicitous' which includes a 'cluster of masculinities whereby men reap the benefits of hegemonic masculinity without actively seeking or supporting it'; and 'subordinate' which are 'oppressed and repressed by hegemonic masculinity' (Skelton 2001:50-51). Hence within the masculine there are multiple masculinities, some of which are dominant and some of which are subordinate.

In this post-structural discourse, schools are active in the construction of gender; they are 'masculine factories' (Heward 1996) or 'masculinity-making devices' (Connell

2000). Ethnographic studies of schools differentiate a range of masculinities within particular institutions: for example, Mac an Ghaill (1994) identifies 'Macho Lads', 'Academic Achievers', 'New Enterprisers' and 'Real Englishmen' (for explanations, see Mac an Ghaill 1994:56-67); and Connell (2000) discusses 'cool guys, swots and wimps' (Connell 2000, chapter 8). Each group has its own subculture of masculinity and the researchers argue that masculinities are developed in relation to each other, as well as in relation to the feminine. Mac an Ghaill's and Connell's work shows that within a school setting there are multiple ways in which being a boy can be carried out and understood. Rowan et al (2002) believe that schools perpetuate hierarchies of masculinity, celebrating hegemonic versions of being a boy and persecuting subordinate versions.

Rowan et al (2002) argue that if masculinity is 'produced, performed and multiple', rather than being 'natural, determined and singular', then there are many ways of being a boy. It follows, then, that there may be many ways of experiencing literacy as a boy. Rowan et al argue that 'ways of 'being a boy' which position literacy and masculinity in opposition to each other are no more natural or permanent than any other form of masculinity' (2002:69). This allows for the possibility of literacy and masculinity being compatible; in some ways of being a boy, engaging in literacy activities can be acceptable, and even desirable.

Epstein (1998) comments that research which examines 'different possible ways of being a boy' is needed, including the 'costs and benefits' of the different ways to the boys themselves (1998:107), and Rowan et al (2002) suggest that there should be an examination of 'the ways in which some versions of masculinity may endorse greater

connections between literacy and masculinity than others' (2002:70). I hope that this study will contribute to this research. The boys examined in this study are at an age where they are aware of gender differences and they are developing a masculine identity. I will examine one way of being a boy or one version of masculinity; specifically, one in which connections between literacy and masculinity are endorsed. I hope to identify how such a masculinity is developed and the ways in which reading has a desirable place in this masculinity.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

The literature discussed in this chapter has shown that there are many negative influences associated with the combined experience of reading and of being a boy. Negative features dominate the literature, probably because it is carried out within the context of boys' underachievement; theorists are looking for reasons why the achievements of boys are lower than those of girls. Regarding reading habits, boys read less than girls and have different reading preferences to girls; further, school reading resources rarely include boys' preferred texts for reading. At home, parents have lower expectations for boys in reading than for girls and boys see reading as being predominantly linked to a female identity. At school, boys are under pressure from their peers not to achieve in reading, current teaching methods may not suit their learning style and, as noted, their reading preferences are frequently absent from the reading curriculum. Literature on boys' reading, then, indicates many negative influences associated with reading and being a boy; in fact, I could not find any literature which identifies any feature of reading success that is associated with being a boy. This literature offers some explanation for differences in achievement between

girls and boys; in fact, given the extent of the negative influences, it is perhaps surprising that the differences are not greater.

Having examined the literature on young successful readers and on boys' reading, I chose to investigate the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of these young successful boy readers. Specifically, I want to explore the extent to which the experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers are in place for these boys, and how they overcome any negative influences associated with reading and being a boy in order to become successful readers. In addition, I want to investigate the boys' reading habits and preferences, in order to discover what these young successful boys read and the place of this reading in their lives. The central research question for this study is therefore the following: What is the reading experience of young successful boy readers? In order to investigate the areas highlighted above, this central question has been broken down into the following questions: What are the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of young successful boy readers? What are the reading habits and preferences of young successful boy readers? What patterns emerge in the reading experience of young successful boy readers?

Chapter 3: Methodology – Research approach

At the end of the previous chapter, the research questions for the empirical work were defined as the following: What are the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of young successful boy readers? What are the reading habits and preferences of young successful boy readers? What patterns emerge in the reading experience of young successful boy readers? This chapter will consider the most suitable research approach for this investigation. Two approaches will be considered in detail: the case study approach and the ethnographic approach. Each of these will be defined, and strengths and limitations will be identified. The contribution of each to the research approach adopted in this study will be then be outlined.

3.1 Discussion of research approach

When considering the most appropriate methodology for examining the above research questions, initially the approaches adopted in similar studies will be examined. Three studies will be discussed in detail: two concerned with successful early readers (Clark 1976, Stainthorp and Hughes 1999) and one concerned with gender and reading (Millard 1997).

Clark (1976) investigated a group of young children who were able to read fluently on entry to school, in an attempt to improve understanding of the processes involved in learning to read. To identify a sample, letters were sent to schools in three Scottish regions asking for the names of children who were able to read fluently when they started school. The criterion for selection was that a child was able to read at least twenty-five words on the Schonell Graded Word Reading Test, indicating a reading

age of at least seven years six months. From this, thirty-two children were identified for the research. The children then undertook eight further formal diagnostic tests: the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (examines reading accuracy and comprehension); the Daniels Spelling Test; the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale; the Wechsler Pre-School and Primary Scale of Intelligence; the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (examines language development); the Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test; Rutter Child Scale A (examines behaviour at home); and Rutter Scale B (examines behaviour in class).

In addition, at the beginning of the research, parents were interviewed and information on adjustment to school was obtained from teachers. The parental interviews were thorough; in an Appendix, Clark lists thirty seven basic questions about literacy and the family, and adds that questions were also asked about pregnancy and birth, early functioning, laterality of child and parents, family learning and family health, and social and emotional behaviour. Approximately one year later, teachers were also asked for information about attainment in relation to others in the class, interest in books, concentration, acceptability to other children and any other factors considered relevant. Finally, two years later children were sent a diary for Christmas and asked to record all of the books they read in January, then the parents and the children were interviewed (separately) two months later. These methods clearly produced large amounts of data, much of which was quantitative.

Millard (1997), examining literacy amongst boys and girls aged 11 to 12 years, collected data in three interconnected ways: through direct observation in the classroom, a questionnaire survey to 255 pupils and semi-structured interviews with a

sample of boys followed up by group interviews in the following year. The questionnaire was particularly interesting since it asked pupils for their 'stories of reading'. It deliberately used an open format, rather than the more usual multiple choice questions with a tick box formula, to allow the pupils to answer in the form of a story. Millard explains that the reason for this was to interest the children and to obtain information as close as possible to the real picture:

> This was intended firstly to engage their interest, and secondly to elicit
>
> answers as close as possible to the reality of their current experience.
>
> (1997:50)

The questionnaire was introduced by a student teacher who read out an introduction and discussed it with the children. This was intended as an 'invitation to writing'. The questionnaire did subsequently have questions, but these were intended as prompts and not as set questions requiring individual answers.

Millard does acknowledge some of the difficulties connected with this approach. Firstly, since the responses were very personal they were not likely to be anonymous, and anonymity is generally believed to increase reliability. Secondly, open questioning makes data analysis more difficult since there is no predetermined scale against which responses can be classified. Millard did however code the responses in order to enter them on a database. This was particularly useful for comparing responses made by girls and boys.

Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) collected a large amount of quantitative data using formal tests. For reading, these included the Concepts about Print Test (Clay 1979b), phonological tasks, alphabet knowledge tasks, reading non-words (to measure

decoding skills), the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability and the British Ability Scales' Word Reading test. All of these assessments were given to the children three times at ages five, six and seven. Writing tasks were also given to the children to assess their abilities in spelling, handwriting, punctuation and composition. In addition, at the end of the project, the children were assessed by their teachers using the SATs in English. Stainthorp and Hughes also conducted interviews with the children and their parents, although, as noted above, the school experience was the focus of their study and, when parents were interviewed, the emphasis was on their perceptions of the school experience.

These three studies are all surveys involving a relatively large number of participants (32, 255 and 29 respectively). Two of the studies include a significant element of collecting quantitative data using formal tests (Clark 1976, Stainthorp and Hughes 1999) and all three studies collected qualitative data using interviews, questionnaires and/or observation.

Having examined these studies, I decided to investigate my research questions by studying a smaller number of boys in greater depth. I hoped that I might be able to add to the existing body of knowledge by delving deeper rather than wider; by collecting data about boys' reading lives in as much depth as possible, rather than collecting data from as many boys as possible. In addition, since the research questions refer to social and cultural influences, they require reading to be studied in its social and cultural context. Hence qualitative data will need to be collected from the social settings in which reading naturally occurs. I therefore decided to examine the case study and ethnographic methodologies further since case study focuses on a

small number of participants and ethnography prioritises the social and cultural context. I hoped that adopting elements of these approaches would give a basis for the examination of the research questions and would ensure that this study made a unique contribution to the current body of knowledge in the area under study.

3.2 Case study

The first approach which will be examined is the case study. This section will discuss previous case studies, define case study, consider the strengths and limitations of the approach and consider the contribution which the approach can make to this study.

3.2.1 Previous case studies of literacy

A number of studies into children's literacy have involved a single case study (Bissex 1980, Paley 1981, Brown 1993) and these generally trace the development of the researcher's child or a child close to the researcher. In addition, a number of studies into children's literacy have involved multiple case studies (Fry 1985, Minns 1990, Fox 1993). In both types of study large amounts of data are collected through observation, interview/conversation and collecting documents, and the findings are generally written up in a 'story' or narrative form. Regarding multiple case studies, it seems that using five to six children is generally regarded as appropriate. Fry (1985) wrote about six children, and Minns (1990) and Fox (1993) each wrote about five children. Three of these studies will now be considered in greater detail as examples of case study research. They illustrate the value that the case study approach can offer research into literacy practices and that case study has successfully been used in literacy research over the last twenty-five years.

Bissex (1980) examined her son learning to read and write between the ages of five and eleven years old. (She does comment that a study over this length of time would not have been possible were she not the parent of the child.) Data was collected in the home and included observations of the child, interviews/conversations with him and documentation of his reading (on tape) and writing. Bissex clearly believes she has engaged in a case study since she says,

> A case study is essentially an attempt to understand another person through enlightened subjectivity, which seeks both to share the experience of another and to reflect upon it from a distance. (1980:vi)

This notion of 'enlightened subjectivity' is interesting; it conveys the notion that the case study researcher combines sharing the experiences of another person with the possibility of reflecting upon these from a distance, and that it is through this combination that insights can be made. Bissex also discusses the value of studying an individual in a case study:

> Case studies widen the parameters within which we view learning to read. ...
> As learning processes exist in their wholeness only in individuals, only through studying individuals may we see these processes at work. (1980:135)

She believes that learning processes can only be illuminated by studying individual children.

Fry (1985) talked to five children about their perceptions of learning to read. His study does not follow case study conventions in a number of areas; data was only collected through conversations and these were held in private rooms rather than in real-life contexts. The study does however systematically investigate a specific

phenomenon and looks at a small number of cases in great depth. Fry says of his study,

> It deliberately restricts itself to six young readers in the belief that such case studies are revealing and helpful because of their peculiarity, and in the hope that their value will increase as they join, and are joined by, other similar studies of individual readers. (1985:1)

So although many case study conventions are not used, Fry does consider that his research adopts a case study approach. Like Bissex, he believes that the value of the study is in the 'peculiarity' of individuals, rather than in generalisations. Fry seems to be promoting a particular approach to research; that of studying individual readers in depth.

Minns (1990) examined five children learning to read. Data was collected from home and school and included interviews with family members and with teachers, observations of children, and documents, including lists made by the families for the researcher, tape recordings of children reading and samples of children's writing. Minns comments that she became a biographer and she wrote five personal histories. She says, 'Any universal truths would come out of the peculiarities of each story' (1990:xx). Minns is acknowledging that generalisations need not be made; the value of the study is in the uniqueness of each case. Like Bissex and Fry above, she is arguing for the value of exploring a small number of individuals in depth, rather than searching for generalisations.

It is significant that all three researchers comment, in some way, that the value of their study comes from the peculiarity and uniqueness of the individual children studied;

their aim was not to identify generalisations. In larger scale studies, such as surveys, peculiarities can be lost in the search for categorisation. Categorisation does have value in identifying trends; however, the value of the case study approach comes from the particularity and the uniqueness of the individual cases studied. 'Universal truths' (Minns 1990) are found in these peculiarities.

3.2.2 Definition of case study

Case studies have traditionally been used in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology and in professions such as law and medicine; the emergence of case studies in educational research is comparatively recent (Simons 1980). In 1975 a conference was held on 'Methods of case study in educational research and evaluation' with the aim of identifying principles, procedures and methods of case study in education (Bassey 1999). While this ambitious aim was not fulfilled at that conference, it does indicate that the place of case study in educational research has been evolving since the 1970s.

In 1980, Nisbet and Watt, discussing case study in educational research, defined a case study as 'a systematic investigation of a specific instance' (1980:4). The 'systematic investigation' involves gathering evidence using a variety of techniques including 'observation, interviews, examining documents or records of pupils' work' (1980:5), and the 'specific instance' may be 'an event or a person or a group, a school or an institution, or an innovation such as a new syllabus, a new method of teaching or a new method of organisation' (1980:4).

Yin (1984), to whom Bassey refers as 'probably the leading exponent in the social sciences of case study' (1999:26), defines case study in the following way:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when

- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which

- multiple sources of evidence are used. (1984:23)

A case study is therefore distinguishable from other approaches, which may have some of these defining points, but will have significant differences. An experiment, for example, separates the phenomenon from its real-life context in order to control the variables. A survey, in which standardised questions are asked of a large number of representative individuals so that common elements can be identified, employs limited sources of evidence, thus reducing the opportunity for unique responses and, again, is removed from the real-life context.

In summary, the significant features of case study seem to be that a specific phenomenon or instance is systematically investigated in its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence. Yin (1984) also notes that case study research can include single- and multiple-case studies; in the latter more than one 'case' is studied.

3.2.3 Strengths of case study

The strength of case study is that the examination of one or a small number of cases can achieve a depth that a study involving a larger number of cases would not be able to attain. Examining a small number of cases allows a large degree of flexibility and

this has two advantages; it can pick up unanticipated results and it can change to take account of new insights. This allows for the possibility of uncovering significant data which might not have come to light had a more structured approach been adopted. Bell (1993) states that,

> The great strength of the case study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. These processes may remain hidden in a large-scale survey but may be crucial to the success or failure of systems or organisations. (1993:8)

Bell argues that the depth in which each case can be examined allows 'crucial processes' to be identified. These, significantly, may have remained hidden in a large-scale survey.

Nisbet and Watt (1980) identify two strengths of the case study. Firstly they consider that case studies should be easily understood by readers outside the professional research circle; they should be intelligible and have a 'three-dimensional reality, like a good documentary' (1980:7). This makes it more likely that the research will reach a wider audience. Secondly that case studies should 'provide suggestions for intelligent interpretation of other similar cases' (1980:8). Nisbet and Watt believe that making suggestions about similar cases, or generalising, is a strength of the case study approach.

Cohen and Manion (1989) also identify the generalisability aspect as a strength of case study research. They identify the purpose of case studies as being,

to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs. (1989:125)

Using the case study to establish generalisations is seen as the purpose of case study. Generalising from case study is, however, also seen as problematic by some researchers and as such will be considered further in the next section.

To summarise, the advantages of the case study approach are that it allows a significant depth of study, it is flexible, it can be easily understood and it allows generalisations from a single instance to similar instances.

3.2.4 Limitations of case study

Case studies have traditionally been regarded 'as a weak sibling among social science methods'; the investigation is perceived 'as having insufficient precision (that is, quantification), objectivity, and rigor' (Yin 1984:10). The most frequently cited criticism is that case studies are not generalisable and therefore the value of the study of a single instance is limited. Since each context is unique, generalisations cannot be meaningfully made. This view is clearly in contrast with the view held by Nisbet and Watt (1980) and by Cohen and Manion (1989), noted above, who consider that generalisations can be meaningfully made from case studies to similar instances.

Simons (1996) discusses the paradox between the study of a single instance and the search for generalisations and believes that this paradox is necessary and should be embraced rather than resolved:

Paradox for me is the point of case study. Living with paradox is crucial to

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understanding. The tension between the study of the unique and the need to generalise is necessary to reveal both the *unique* and the *universal* and the *unity* of that understanding. To live with ambiguity, to challenge certainty, to creatively encounter, is to arrive, eventually, at 'seeing' anew.

(his italics) (1996:237-8)

Simons suggests that the paradox encourages an understanding which combines the unique and the universal and which allows phenomena to be seen in a new light.

Bassey (1981) defended the case study, believing that studying a single event is a worthwhile exercise. He says that if case studies,

are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research. (1981:86)

Bassey's discussion of the distinguishing features of relatability and generalisability are of interest. He believes that the value of a case study can come from teachers relating their decision-making to case studies that have been carried out in similar situations.

More recently, Bassey (1999) has bought an interesting new dimension to this area with his discussion of 'fuzzy generalisations'; general statements with built-in uncertainty. Bassey explains that there is an academic literature of 'fuzzy logic' and that this term was bought into educational discussions by Fourali (1997) who argued for 'fuzzy assessment' in which 'the value of imprecision rather than phoney exactness' is argued for (1999:12). Regarding fuzzy generalisations, Bassey says:

'Do y instead of x and your pupils will learn more.' This is pithy and may be memorable, but left like that it is contrary to the truth ethic of research, for it omits the details of context and circumstance which give it meaning and it has a certainty and absoluteness which we know is never the case.

... in the use of the adjective 'fuzzy' the likelihood of there being exceptions is clearly recognised and this seems an appropriate concept for research in areas like education where human complexity is paramount. (1999:51-2)

This seems a useful way forward. The use of a 'fuzzy generalisation' allows researchers to make statements which recognise that there will be exceptions, rather than making absolute statements which do not sit comfortably with ethical principles since they cannot be absolute when context, circumstance and human complexity are all variables. Those who hold the belief that generalisations cannot be made from case studies may be more comfortable if the generalisations are made in 'fuzzy' rather than absolute terms.

A second criticism that has been levelled against case study research is that it tends to be more personal and subjective than alternative approaches. From the large amount of data obtained the researcher selects that material which will be included and that which will be excluded. This allows an element of bias to creep into the process. Nisbet and Watt (1980) suggest a number of possibilities for reducing the effects of researcher bias. Firstly, a sufficient amount of the evidence should be presented 'to allow the reader to see how the conclusions are reached and also to allow him to develop alternative interpretations' (1980:5). Secondly, the researcher should 'achieve a degree of objectivity by bringing bias out into the open' (ibid.). It is good practice for researchers to acknowledge their 'bias' in the area of study; for example, the

opinions they hold at the outset of the research process. This allows readers to be aware of the researcher's personal views and therefore to scrutinise the evidence with this in mind. The reader can then consider whether the evidence has been presented in a way that confirms the researcher's initial views, when perhaps alternative views could have been elicited from the evidence.

A final criticism levelled against case studies are that they take too long and result in 'massive, unreadable documents' (Yin 1984:21). This is in contrast to Nisbet and Watt (1980) who suggested that case studies are usually easy to read. Yin does discuss ways of writing up case studies which avoid lengthy narrative.

To conclude, the limitations of the case study are based around the issues of generalisability, researcher bias and unreadable documents. This section has considered these issues and discussed some suggestions for reducing the negative effects of these limitations.

3.2.5 The place of case study in this research

It seems that the case study approach will be a valuable one for examining the research questions identified for this study. When the case study approach is defined in the terms used above, that is, as a specific phenomenon or instance which is systematically investigated in its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence, it can make a significant contribution to evidence collection. In this study, six cases of young successful boy readers will be studied, the real-life contexts will be the home and the school, and data will be systematically collected using multiple sources of evidence, including observations of children at home and at school,

interviews/conversations with children, parents and teachers, and the collection of documents such as reading diaries and school records.

Having examined case studies into children's literacy, it seems that this approach will offer the opportunity to examine individual children in depth and search for truth through the uniqueness of each case. After considering the strengths and limitations of the case study approach, it seems that this approach will allow a significant depth of study and will be flexible so that changes can be made to the research process as it evolves. If generalisations are made this can be done in a 'fuzzy' way to acknowledge that they are not absolute. The difficulties of researcher bias can be addressed by presenting sufficient evidence for any findings which are discussed.

3.3 Ethnography

The second approach which will be examined is ethnography. In this section, the special role of ethnography in literacy research will be outlined. Previous ethnographic studies will be discussed, and the strengths and limitations of the approach will be considered. The contribution of ethnography to this study will then be identified.

3.3.1 Previous ethnographic studies of literacy

Three studies have been chosen for examination. Two of these have been chosen because they are seminal examples of ethnographic research and literacy (Heath 1983, Barton and Hamilton 1998). The other has been chosen because, although it is not a piece of ethnography, it adopts ethnographic methods and the subject matter is close to that which will be researched in this study: early reading (Minns 1990).

Heath (1983) examined children learning to use language at home and at school in three communities a few miles apart in the southeastern United States: Roadville – a white working class community, Trackton – a black working class community and Maintown – the area occupied by largely professional mainstream black and white people of the region. She was attempting to address a central question: 'for each of these groups, what were the effects of the preschool home and community environment on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings?' (1983:4) To explore this question, Heath 'lived, worked, and played with the children and their families and friends' (1983:5). She collected data largely through the use of fieldnotes. She says,

> Often I was able to write in a field notebook while minding children, tending food, or watching television with the families; otherwise, I wrote fieldnotes as soon as possible afterwards when I left the community on an errand or to go to school .... Neither community members and teachers nor I considered that any special demands of data collection should alter normal habits. (1983:9)

Heath collected data for nearly a decade in this way and therefore had a considerable amount of qualitative data. She considered herself an ethnographer who was researching and recording a unique piece of social history.

In a discussion of the method used, Heath comments that the research does not contain the scientific elements of experiments, controlled conditions, systematic score-keeping on the academic gains and losses of specific children, or data taped at periodic intervals under similar conditions over a predesignated period of time. Rather, it records the natural flow of community and classroom life over nearly a

decade (1983:7-8). Heath identifies two particularly positive aspects to her method; firstly she had an established relationship with the communities ensuring open access and co-operation, and secondly she had no deadlines or demands from outside funding agencies which may have pressurised or attempted to shape the research. Heath believes that previous research on child language had not acknowledged the place of the child's community or the social and cultural context of the child. It was therefore particularly important for Heath that the research was able to be carried out in this way; embedded in the community and in the social and cultural context of the children under study.

More recently, Barton and Hamilton (1998) studied literacy in one particular community in Britain; a neighbourhood in Lancaster. The goal of the study was to 'uncover patterns and regularities in the organisation of one aspect of cultural life (literacy)' (1998:57). The researchers used research methods that enabled them to explore literacy in its context; in people's contemporary lives and in the histories and traditions from which these came. More specifically, they collected data in the following ways: twenty semi-structured interviews with college students; sixty-five door-to-door household surveys; twelve in-depth case studies; further interviews and case studies of community groups and organisations; ten participants involved in the interpretation of data; and interviews and observations, including photographs and document collections, in the city centre. The majority of their data was therefore collected using semi-structured interviews and observations.

Although their study does not focus on children, the methodology is interesting to examine for a number of reasons. Firstly, Barton and Hamilton treated literacy as a social practice and examined it in this context. In the foreward, David Bloome says,

> With the publication of *Local Literacies* it is no longer possible to describe literacy credibly without also describing the people involved and the places in which it occurs. (1998:xii)

This stance towards literacy had implications for the research methods adopted. The second reason for examining Barton and Hamilton's methodology is that they attempted to be innovative, while drawing heavily on ethnographic research traditions. They explain,

> we were not taking one specific well-tried methodology off the shelf for this project. Significant methodological decisions were made as the research progressed, allowing the topic of the research to shape the methods, adapting and evolving new strategies over time. We are consciously developing methodology in this research. (1998:58)

The authors felt that devising their own methodology, rather than a 'well-tried' one, allowed them to make decisions about the methods and strategies used as the research progressed; these are described in some detail and a rationale for each decision is provided.

Two particularly interesting features of the methods and strategies chosen are the following. Firstly, Barton and Hamilton asked participants to help analyse the data and comment on the researcher's analysis and understanding of the data; they call this the 'collaborative ethnography stage' in the research and the rationale for this was 'to explore new ways of involving informants in the interpretation of data' (Barton and

Hamilton 1998:66). Ten participants took part in this process. Secondly, Barton and Hamilton believed that one-off interviews threatened the validity of any conclusions based on them. They quote from a fieldworker's notes:

> One thing our methodology has taught us is that initial interviews – one-off interviews with respondents – are not enough. However thorough they appear at the time, they can prove to be superficial to the point of being misleading. If we had not involved people in [the process of repeated interviews], we would, in some cases, have had a very limited overview of their literacy practices; and might well have held inaccurate beliefs about their values. (1998:65)

The implication is that accurate information can only be obtained by spending time with people; one-off interviews can provide misleading data.

Minns (1990) was interested in exploring language and learning, prompted largely by questions that arose as a result of observing individual children in her school. She reports that over a number of years she gradually became aware that it was not helpful to consider the child an 'individual learner'; to understand their development more fully, account had to be taken of 'the collaborative manner in which children read and write' and of 'the social and cultural contexts in which this language learning took place' (Minns 1990:xi). Minns became aware that she was only going to learn more about children's reading by involving families from the local community:

> I knew that if I wanted to learn more about the children and their reading in my own school, I needed to get out into the community in order to begin to make sense of the world the children were living in, and to focus on the way their families used reading and writing in their own lives. (1990:xii)

She subsequently invited six families to work with her, observing and recording their four year olds learning to become readers during the year in which they started school. Families were chosen to represent a range of ethnic groups and a balance of girls and boys. All of the families agreed to work with Minns, although one family moved out of the area soon after the research began. Minns also spoke to the two class teachers who would be working with the children and they agreed to help with the project.

Data was collected in a number of ways and from both home and school. Three visits were made to each family and interviews were carried out asking about their child, their social practices and their views of literacy. Interviews were sometimes with only the mother, sometimes with both parents and sometimes included the child and other siblings. In addition, parents were asked to tape record themselves reading with their child, sharing a book they both enjoyed. Finally families were asked to list the writing materials they had in their home. In school, children were observed and talked to informally in their classrooms. In addition, they were recorded reading with their teachers and with their peers. Examples of each child's early writing were collected and Minns discussed each child's progress with their class teacher. Minns also continued to visit the families two or three times a year to keep in touch. Minns comments that she tried to be 'observer, listener, sharer, interpreter and finally storyteller of events in the lives of these children and their families' (1990:xix). The methods described accumulated a considerable amount of data which Minns chose to write up in the form of biographies:

> I had amassed a great deal of evidence and needed to find a way of presenting
>
> it that reflected and illuminated the children's lives and their entrance into
>
> reading. Each child's life was uniquely rich and I chose to become a

biographer for each of them, writing each story as it unfolded in its own way

..... By the time each was written I wanted to have five personal histories in

front of me. (1990:xix-xx)

Minns subsequently wrote five 'stories', representing five children's personal reading

histories. These integrated information from the home and from school and therefore

attempted to represent each child's complete literacy environment.

It can be seen, then, that ethnographic studies and studies which draw on ethnographic

research traditions and methods have been used successfully to examine literacy. A

significant feature of these studies is that literacy is regarded as a social practice

which is best studied in its social setting.

3.3.2 Definition of ethnography

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) regard the researcher's involvement in people's

lives as central to an ethnographic approach:

> The ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for
>
> an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said,
>
> asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light
>
> on the issues with which he or she is concerned. (1983:2)

Ethnography involves living or working alongside a group or community of people,

engaging in conversations and observations, to glean information about the area being

examined. Ethnography starts from the premise that people's experiences cannot be

separated from the context in which they occur. Ethnographers do not consider

research carried out under strict scientific, laboratory conditions appropriate when

social practices are being examined; social practices cannot be examined outside the social context in which they naturally occur. Smith (1998) comments:

> The point is to see them (people) in the context in which their lives take place and to try to reconstruct their experiences, beliefs, understandings from their own standpoint. (1998:343)

The ethnographer attempts to reconstruct people's 'experiences, beliefs and understandings' by identifying the participants' viewpoints.

Ethnography is a research approach that has largely been utilised by anthropologists; those studying the societies and customs of human beings. Educationalists have been criticised for carrying out research labelled 'ethnographic', while not conforming to the rules of ethnography, as defined by anthropologists, in either data collection or analysis. Lutz (1986), discussing these criticisms, distinguishes between ethnography and ethnographic methods; it may be appropriate to adopt a selected and limited sample of ethnographic methods, but this does not necessarily produce a piece of 'ethnography'. In order to consider the factors that make a piece of research ethnographic, the writing of Goetz and LeCompte (1984) and Lutz (1986) will be discussed.

Ethnography is a way of studying human life; it provides researchers with ways of describing, interpreting, and explaining the social world. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) identify four features which characterise the strategies used in an ethnographic approach and which allow for this 'cultural reconstruction':

- Strategies used elicit phenomenological data; they represent the world view of the participants being investigated and participant constructs are used to

structure the research.

- Strategies are empirical and naturalistic; participant and non-participant observation are used to acquire firsthand, sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real-world settings.

- Ethnographic research is holistic; ethnographers seek to construct descriptions of total phenomena within various contexts.

- Ethnography is multimodal or eclectic; a variety of research techniques are used to collect data. (1984:3)

Goetz and LeCompte believe that the above factors must be evident if a piece of research is to be described as ethnography.

The starting point for Lutz (1986) is that researchers are engaged in the search for meaning and that 'the first step in this search is the development of as complete a body of data that describes the phenomenon being studied' (1986:111). Lutz (1986) discusses Geertz's definition of ethnography as 'thick description':

According to Geertz (1973), ethnography is 'thick description'. From this thick description, the anthropologist attempts to build a model of the important and recurring variables and the relationships among these variables, that describes and accounts for the phenomenon. (1986:111)

Lutz identifies four 'ingredients' that he believes are important for pursuing a holistic ethnographic approach to educational research:

(a) Use of a researcher trained to do ethnography

(b) Entry into the educational system which permits the pursuit of data vertically as well as horizontally through the cultural system

(c) A cross-cultural perspective of the research

(d) Ability of the ethnographers to develop 'thick description' and bring anthropological models and theory to bear on that ethnography.

(1986:112)

Lutz discusses each of these areas. Regarding the use of a trained researcher, he suggests that an ethnographer is someone who has published one or more ethnographies, or a person who can demonstrate that they have been trained in ethnographic methods. Regarding entry into the field, he suggests that it is necessary to ensure that there is as little restriction on data collection as possible. Ethnography involves a special kind of description, a thick description, and essential to this is that the data collected 'should not be limited by personal bias, theoretical framework, or the setting' (1986:113). In advocating a cross-cultural perspective, Lutz recommends that ethnography should not be restricted to the culture of a single setting, such as one school or classroom. If this is the case, it will be likely that much of the meaning and rationality of the behaviour observed will be lost, since the school or classroom does not operate in isolation:

Behaviour in a classroom cannot be understood apart from the influences of smaller peer groups, the larger school, and the total school district-community.

(1986:116)

Settings therefore have to be considered in the wider context. Lutz believes that the application of anthropological models, concepts and theory is necessary to guide data collection and analysis. Without this, the research cannot be generalised beyond the specific case. The ability to draw from a broader range of anthropological models and theories, in order to make sense of and understand data, is required if the potential of the research is to be met.

Using the work of Goetz and LeCompte and Lutz, the following points have been identified as those that must be present if a piece of research is to be considered ethnographic: the participants' perspective is represented; data is obtained from real-world settings; the total phenomena is considered in a variety of contexts/settings; a variety of research techniques are used to collect data; the researcher must be trained; data collection should not be overly restricted; and the data should be analysed in the context of anthropological theory. In addition, it was noted that Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) regard being involved in people's lives as central to an ethnographic approach; ethnography involves living or working alongside a group or community of people, engaging largely in observations and conversations, to glean information about the area being examined.

3.3.3 Strengths of ethnographic research

The strength of ethnography is that it bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:2). There are no laboratories or experimental conditions that take the area under examination out of context. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) refer to the paradigm of naturalism; followers of this paradigm believe that ethnography is 'the central, if not the only legitimate, social science research method' (1983:2).

Many of the features of ethnography, defined above, can be seen in the studies examined earlier. Heath (1983) immersed herself in different cultures and examined children learning to use language in their everyday social and cultural context. She used a notebook to informally record conversations and observations that she made over a period of almost a decade. Barton and Hamilton (1998) were primarily

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concerned with studying literacy in its social context and drew on a number of methods to facilitate this. They also involved participants in analysing the data obtained to ensure that the participants' perspective was interpreted accurately. In both cases, the write-up of these pieces of research contained significant amounts of the participants' own words. Minns (1990) collected data from the children's real-world settings (home and school) by 'observing, listening, sharing and interpreting' (1990:xix). These verbs, identified by Minns, give the impression of an informal approach; of working alongside families rather than an approach involving lots of formal questioning. She then reported these observations as stories, using a considerable amount of the children's own words. In fact, the title of the published research, *Read it to me now!*, is a phrase from one of her young participants. The notion of writing stories of children's reading is interesting because it implies a narrative stance and is compatible with an ethnographic approach since it represents a move away from structured questions, administered by questionnaire or formal interview, to an open format which allows the participants to set the agenda and use their own voice; to tell their story.

3.3.4 Limitations of ethnographic research

A number of criticisms have been levelled at ethnographic research. The first is that it is not 'scientific' enough. This raises the discussion as to whether social sciences can be examined using natural science methods. Some people evidently think that natural science methods should be adopted. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note that,

> Ethnography has sometimes been dismissed as quite inappropriate to social
> science, on the grounds that the data and findings it produces are 'subjective',

mere idiosyncratic impressions that cannot provide a solid foundation for

rigorous scientific analysis. (1983:2)

This position is represented by the paradigm of positivism (the opposite of the

paradigm of naturalism discussed above in section 3.3.3); followers of this paradigm

believe that quantitative research methods produce more reliable and valid data than

ethnographic, qualitative methods (1983:2).

Hammersley (1992) identifies two further areas of criticism against ethnography. The

first criticism concerns the issue of representation; that the ethnographer influences

the social situation under examination, and that ethnographic accounts construct,

rather than represent, reality:

the data which ethnographers use is a product of their participation in the field

rather than a reflection of the phenomenon studied, and/or is constructed in

and through the process of analysis and the writing of ethnographic accounts.

(1992:2)

Similarly, Smith (1998) acknowledges that ethnography can be fraught with difficulty

since any attempt to reconstruct events, relations and processes will be influenced by

the researchers' own experiences and conceptual frameworks (1998:343).

Ethnographers cannot help bringing their personal beliefs and values into the

interpretation of the area that is the focus of attention. This is therefore an illustration

of the ethnographer influencing and constructing the social situation under

examination.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that researchers should recognise that they

are part of the social world that they study, and they refer to this as the reflexive

character of social research. They do not however regard this as a problem, so long as researchers subject the knowledge they have to systematic inquiry. Further they suggest that how people respond to the presence of a researcher may be as informative as how they react to other situations (1983:14-5). Hammersley and Atkinson regard reflexivity as a middle way between the extremes of the naturalist and positivist paradigms; researchers scrutinising the interpretation and analysis of their data in light of their personal beliefs and values can be more valid than either the extreme of naturalism (reporting social practices without this type of scrutiny) or the extreme of positivism (subjecting a social practice to scientific tests out of context).

The second criticism of ethnography, discussed by Hammersley (1992), is that it fails to contribute to practice in the area of study; either political activity or relevant occupational practice. Arguments have been made for making ethnography more directly relevant to practice, or even for integrating it with practice. Hammersley responds to this by saying that research does not have to be multi-purpose, i.e. serve the needs of practitioners and contribute to the cumulative knowledge of the research community (1992:2 and 6). He does, however, suggest that one criterion for assessing the value of a piece of ethnographic research should be its relevance, concerning the importance of the research topic and the contribution to knowledge made by the findings of the study (1992:78).

A third criticism levelled at ethnographic research is that since every piece of ethnography is representative of a specific group of people at a specific time, it cannot have any general relevance and is therefore of limited value. Hammersley (1992) believes that ethnographers try to generalise their findings in two ways; by treating

the case studied as representative of a larger population and therefore of wider relevance (empirical generalisation), and by using the case studied to exemplify or establish a theory (theoretical inference). If ethnographers are to make an empirical generalisation, then they must make decisions about the population to which the generalisation can be made and collect and present evidence about the typicality of the case studied. Theoretical inference is more problematic since it is premised on the existence of universal, deterministic sociological laws, and most ethnographers would not acknowledge that there are deterministic or probabilistic laws since human behaviour is creative and formative (1992:5-6 and 92-3). The issue of generalisability can therefore be problematic and can limit the relevance of a study if not addressed.

Finally, ethnographic studies have been criticised for not providing detailed information about the methodology used. It is significant that Barton and Hamilton (1998) gave considerable detail regarding the methods they employed. They stated that they deliberately made their methodology as explicit as possible since criticisms have been made that ethnography 'has a tradition of not being explicit about methodology' (1998:58). Educational research has also come under this criticism recently (for example; Tooley and Darby 1998). A lack of methodological information devalues the research since it means that the research cannot be evaluated or replicated.

3.3.5 The place of ethnography in this study

It is now necessary to consider whether the ethnographic approach is appropriate for examining the research questions identified earlier regarding young successful boy readers. I want to investigate social and cultural influences on the reading experience

of young successful boy readers, hence it was recognised earlier that qualitative data will need to be collected from the social settings in which reading naturally occurs. Many of the features of ethnography identified above (section 3.3.2) will facilitate this. Firstly, data is obtained from a variety of real-world settings; ethnography starts from the premise that people's experiences cannot be separated from the context in which they occur. In this study, settings will include the home and school environments since these are the 'real-world settings' in which reading takes place. Secondly, data is obtained using a variety of research techniques, which include 'watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:2). In this study, data will be obtained through observations and interviews/conversations; through a variety of methods, it is hoped that a 'complete' picture of each boy's reading experience will be built up. Thirdly, data collection should not be restricted. In this study, I hope that restrictions will not be placed on observations and conversations in the home and school environments. I hope that restrictions can be kept to a minimum through sensitivity in the early stages; for example, by assuring participants that data will be treated confidentially, and by building up a trusting relationship with the participants over time. Finally, the participants' perspective is represented. In this study, this will involve identifying the nature of each boy's reading experience and using the boys' own words as much as possible.

However, it is also recognised that it will not be possible to fulfil all of the requirements which would enable this piece of research to be considered a piece of ethnography. Firstly, it will not be possible to 'participate in people's daily lives for an extended period of time' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:2). As the researcher, I

shall 'drop in and out of the participants' daily lives'. This is necessary due to the nature of the study. I am examining participants with a common attribute (successful reading); the participants do not live in one community themselves. In addition, the study is being undertaken part-time, thus living alongside the participants is restricted due to the limited amount of time available. Secondly, I am not trained to do ethnography; my background is in education not anthropology. Thirdly, the intention is not to analyse the data within the context of anthropological theory. The study has a specific focus and the data will be analysed within the context of theory related to early reading development, particularly that which refers to boys' reading.

To summarise, then, the use of ethnographic tools can make a valuable contribution to the examination of the research questions in this study; however, it is recognised that this research cannot be labelled a piece of ethnography.

3.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has attempted to consider the most appropriate research approaches for investigating young successful boy readers; specifically the research questions identified in the chapter introduction. It seems that these research questions can best be examined by drawing on a combination of case study and ethnographic approaches. In fact, many aspects of these approaches overlap. Case study requires the phenomenon to be studied in a real-life setting and ethnography requires the group to be studied in its social context. In both cases this will be the home and the school. Case study uses the uniqueness of cases to search for insights and ethnography requires the child's perspective to be valued and for data collection to include children's own words. In both cases the emphasis will be on the individual boys

involved. Case study and ethnography both require the researcher's beliefs and values to be explicit so that they can be scrutinised against the interpretation and analysis of data. And generally, as with all research approaches, the research area must be of importance and contribute to knowledge in the area of study, and the methodology should be made as explicit as possible to allow the study to be evaluated and possibly replicated.

The methodological approach adopted in this study, then, can best be described as multiple case study using ethnographic tools. The following chapter will continue the methodological discussion by considering data collection and analysis, and the selection criteria and process for identifying six boys with whom to work.

Chapter 4: Methodology – Data collection and analysis

At the end of the previous chapter, it was noted that the methodological approach adopted in this study will be multiple case study using ethnographic tools. The research questions identified for this study will be investigated by examining six cases of young successful boy readers. In this chapter, data collection methods will be discussed; observation, research conversation and documentary analysis will be identified as the most appropriate methods of data collection for this study. Issues concerning the collection of data from young children will then be highlighted and the way in which I set out to gain rich qualitative data from the boys themselves will be discussed. The specific data collection activities will then be presented. Next, the criteria and process which I adopted for selecting a group of boys will be highlighted, and biographical details of the boys will be given. Finally, the way in which the data will be analysed will be outlined and critically considered.

4.1 Data collection methods

In the previous chapter, the most suitable approaches for addressing the research questions were discussed. It was concluded that multiple case study using ethnographic tools would be used. The next stage is to consider appropriate methods of data collection for the cases. Regarding methods of data collection used in case study research, Nisbet and Watt (1980) discuss interviews, observations and the study of documents. Their discussion of interviews is interesting since they state that 'the case study interview has a style of its own' (1980:14). They characterise the case study interview as loosely structured, thus enabling the interviewees to respond in unique ways. It is, however, also acknowledged that the interviewers cannot be totally

neutral since they have to indicate the topics or areas that they want the interviewee to talk about. Nisbet and Watt acknowledge that this balance between openness and structure can be difficult to achieve. Given that the nature of the case study interview is 'loosely structured', it is useful at this point to consider the difference between an interview and a conversation. Fry (1985), in a multiple case-study in which he talked to children about books and reading, considered his method to involve conversations rather than interviews. He says,

> Although it is possible for an interview to be informal, conversation seems to leave more possibilities open for unexpected insights and changes in direction. It also creates a different relationship between the participants .... The young readers in this study all make valuable statements about reading which I feel would not have been said in any other context but conversation. (1985:2)

Fry clearly distinguishes between an informal interview and a conversation, believing that the latter allows greater possibilities for unexpected insights and changes in direction. In characterising his method as conversation, he says that he had no questionnaire or questions, although he did find there were questions he wanted to ask about particular books. This highlights the difficulty acknowledged by Nisbet and Watt in getting the right balance between openness and structure. Fry seems to err on the side of openness, and therefore his interviews/conversations had little formal structure. Hence, a research conversation has more openness but little structure, whilst an informal interview has more structure and possibly therefore less openness. A balance between the two is required by the case study researcher.

A decision has to be taken regarding whether the observations will be participant or non-participant. Cohen and Manion (1989) define the former as a role in which 'the

observer engages in the very activities he sets out to observe' (1989:125) and the

latter as one where the observer 'stands aloof from the group activity he is

investigating and eschews group membership' (1989:127). In participant observation,

the researcher may or may not be under 'cover', i.e. the group may or may not know

that they are being observed. Covert observation does raises ethical issues for

researchers; they have to consider when it might be appropriate to observe people

without their knowledge and therefore without their consent.

Bassey (1999), discussing case study research, identifies the same three data

collection methods as Nisbet and Watt (1980); interview, observation and

documentary analysis:

> There are three major methods of collecting research data: asking questions
>
> (and listening intently to the answers), observing events (and noting carefully
>
> what happens) and reading documents. (1999:81)

The use of a number of methods has advantages since it builds in a degree of

triangulation. Data obtained from one method or source can be checked against that

obtained from another method or source. For example, an interviewee's responses can

be checked by observation and by documentary analysis. Nisbet and Watt point out

that,

> ... direct observation may be more reliable than what people say. Interviews
>
> reveal how people perceive what happens, not what actually happens. Both the
>
> actual events and the perceptions are important data, and so usually you have
>
> to combine interview and observation. (1980:17)

A researcher's observations may contradict what has been said in an interview. Nisbet

and Watt make the point that both sets of data are valid, but that the researcher must

be aware of the contradiction. The use of a number of data collection methods allows the results to be more reliable since they have been cross-checked, and triangulation is therefore a significant factor in addressing the reliability of research. Recently, educational research has been criticised for not including triangulation in its methodology (Tooley and Darby 1998).

Bell (1993) states that the most frequently used methods of data collection in case study are observation and interview, although she adds that no method should be excluded as long as it is 'appropriate for the task' (1993:8). This point is significant since it serves as a reminder that the methods chosen should suit the research questions rather than the conventions of a particular approach. Bassey (1999) reiterates this point. He recommends working out the method 'based on your research questions' (1999:81).

These data collection methods are compatible with those adopted in ethnography. It was recognised in the previous chapter (section 3.3.2), that in ethnographic studies a number of data collection methods are adopted, including observation and interview/conversation.

Having identified observation, interview and documentary analysis as appropriate data collection methods, the application of each of these to this study will now be discussed, and the reliability and validity of each method will be considered. Reliability is the extent to which a 'test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions' and validity is the extent to which 'an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe' (Bell 1993:64-5).

4.1.1 Observation

It was noted above that a decision has to be taken regarding whether observation will be participant or non-participant. In this study, observation will largely be non-participant. This is inevitable since I shall be visiting homes and schools for relatively brief periods of time, rather than living or working in these settings.

When carrying out observations, researchers need to be aware that their presence may influence the situation being observed; the presence of the observer may cause changes in the usual behaviour of those being observed, considerably reducing the reliability and validity of the data. Whilst observers may not be able to eliminate the effects of their presence altogether, it is important to be aware of this factor and to make efforts to minimise their effect on the environment. King (1979) carried out non-participant observation in an infant classroom and used the following strategies in an attempt to minimise the effects of his presence on the children; standing to create a physical distance between himself and the children, showing no interest in what the children were doing, not talking to the children, referring children to the teacher if they did approach him and avoiding eye contact. When carrying out observations in school, I intend using the following strategies to minimise the effect of my presence on the situation being observed; sitting in an unobtrusive position, keeping quiet and not making eye contact with the participants during the observations. However, my presence will not be concealed and the children will be aware of my actions. In this way I hope to minimise the effect of my presence and therefore increase the reliability and validity of the data obtained.

When carrying out observations, the purpose of the observations often makes it advisable to consider the use of a recording system such as a chart or a checklist. It is impossible to record everything that occurs and unstructured observations can produce large amounts of unfocused data. It is necessary to identify the data that is required from the observations, in order to address the research questions, and to focus on obtaining this information. When carrying out observations I intend using recording systems. These will vary according to the data required from the observation; for example, when observing evidence of literacy in the home environment a checklist will be useful, and when observing a boy's involvement during a literacy lesson a chart with behaviours to look for and tally, such as how often he responds to a question and how often he asks a question, will be useful. In addition, it is necessary to pilot recording systems to ensure that they are workable at a practical level and that the required data is obtained. The piloting process therefore contributes to ensuring that the data collected from the observations are reliable and valid.

Details of the observation activities, observation schedules and piloting procedures can be found in section 4.3 below.

4.1.2 Interview/conversation

An issue that needs to be considered when using interviews as a data collection method is how structured they will be; I recognised above that interviews within this method are 'loosely structured' and that a balance between openness and structure is required. A comparison between an interview and a conversation was discussed above (section 4.1). I intend using 'research conversations' since I believe these will achieve

the desired balance between openness and structure, and because, as Fry recognised, they are suitable for use with children. They will be open since they will have features of a conversation; the interviewee will have some control over the direction and the pace of the interaction. There will not be a list of pre-prepared questions asked by the interviewer and answered by the interviewee. However they will also be structured since they will have features of a 'loosely structured' interview; the interviewer will have prompts to ensure that the interaction focuses on the research questions.

Research conversations will take place with the boys, to ensure that they are central to the research process and that their voice is heard, and with their parents and teachers, since some of the data required cannot be obtained from the boys themselves. Research conversations will take place in children's natural environments, the home and the classroom, with familiar adults and materials around them (see discussion in section 4.2 below). This should ensure that the children are more relaxed and spontaneous, thus increasing the reliability of their responses and their behaviour.

When carrying out interviews, researchers need to be aware of potential bias areas. Cohen and Manion (1989) note that greater validity can be achieved by minimising bias and that sources of bias can include the following:

> the attitudes and opinions of the interviewer; a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in his own image; a tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support his preconceived notions; misperceptions on the part of the interviewer of what the respondent is saying; and misunderstandings on the part of the respondent of what is being asked. (1989:318)

It is therefore crucial that interviewers suspend their own attitudes and opinions during an interview and that questions or prompts are objective and unambiguous. The interviewer must be careful not to lead interviewees using subtle features such as leading questions, tone of voice or body language. For my research conversations, I intend having a prompt sheet to ensure that the conversations stay focused on the research questions. It will be important to ensure that my prompts are objective and unambiguous and that my responses to interviewees' comments appear neutral.

It is necessary to consider how the research conversations will be recorded. Generally, interviews may be recorded by the interviewer noting the interviewees' responses on paper or by tape-recording the interview. I hope to tape-record the interviews but it will be necessary to obtain the consent of the participants to do this. If participants do not consent, the conversations will be recorded using note-taking. Tape-recording interviews does require them to be transcribed and this is a time-consuming process; however, it does have a number of advantages. Firstly it allows the interview to be heard again, in full, as often as required; it does not rely on the interviewer's memory to recall aspects that there was not time to note down. Secondly, it allows for quotes from the interviewees. The research approach adopted in this study is one where the boys are placed centrally, are active subjects and are reflexive about their experiences, thoughts and feelings; quoting their voices is a significant part of this approach. In addition to quoting the boys' voices, the voices of other participants, particularly parents and teachers, can also be quoted. Thirdly, dispensing with the 'barrier' of the notebook allows eye contact to be maintained and body language more suited to a conversation.

Finally, as with observation recording systems, research conversations need to be piloted. Again, this will ensure that the interview is practically workable and that the prompts obtain the required data; again, this piloting will contribute to ensuring that the data collected from the research conversations is reliable and valid.

Details of the research conversations, conversation prompt sheets and piloting procedures can be found in section 4.3 below.

4.1.3 Documentary analysis

The final data collection method that will be used is documentary analysis. Bell (1993) notes that documentary analysis can be used in educational projects to supplement information obtained by other methods or it can be the central method of research. In this study, the analysis of documents will supplement information obtained by observations and research conversations. This study is attempting to address the research questions using a qualitative approach which requires a depth of description or 'thick description'. It is therefore desirable to collect any data which can contribute to the consideration of the research questions, and documents such as reading records and reading diaries can do this. Details of the documents collected can be found in section 4.3 below.

4.2 Collecting data from children

In this section, the need for data collection methods which are designed with children in mind, rather than using those which are adapted from methods designed for use with adults, will be discussed. An attempt to design a method specifically for

collecting rich qualitative data from young children will be described and illustrated, and the strengths and the limitations of the method will be scrutinised.

4.2.1 'Childcentric' Research Conversations

It has been acknowledged that the use of children as research participants has significant implications for the research methodologies involved. O'Kane (2000) points out that the researcher has to consider 'whether existing research methodologies and ethical positions, largely designed for adults, are appropriate when the research participant is a child' (2000:136). Christensen and James (2000) comment that if research is to be conducted with children and if children's voices are to be heard, then they need help in order to explain their lives in a way that adults can understand, and methods adopted must encourage children to articulate their experiences and thoughts. Burgess (2000) argues that, in order to achieve this successfully, innovatory methods of data collection need to be developed:

> No longer can researchers assume that those social science methods that are used to study adults can be used in the same way to study children. Instead, researchers need to give some thought to ways in which innovatory methods of social investigation can be developed and used with children so as to gain access to children's perspectives of the worlds in which they live and work.
>
> (2000:xiv)

The diagram below represents my attempt to achieve this; I have attempted to develop an innovatory method of data collection which allows children to articulate their experiences and thoughts. Rather than adopting, or even adapting, a method originally designed for use with adult participants, the method is designed for use with child

participants; it is designed to gain access to children's perspectives of their own worlds.

The method is designed to centre on the child, particularly on creating a context in which the child will feel able to talk in a relaxed and comfortable manner. The interaction takes place within the child's natural social settings; places with which the child is familiar and in which he/she is used to working and playing. In the case of this research study, this was the home and the school. Initially the child is engaged in a familiar activity; through this activity, a relationship is developed between the child and the researcher, and a conversation is facilitated. Familiar activities used include drawing and looking at books together. During this conversation, the researcher is able to initiate discussion on the research topic. I have called the method a 'childcentric' research conversation and it is visually represented in Figure 1 below.
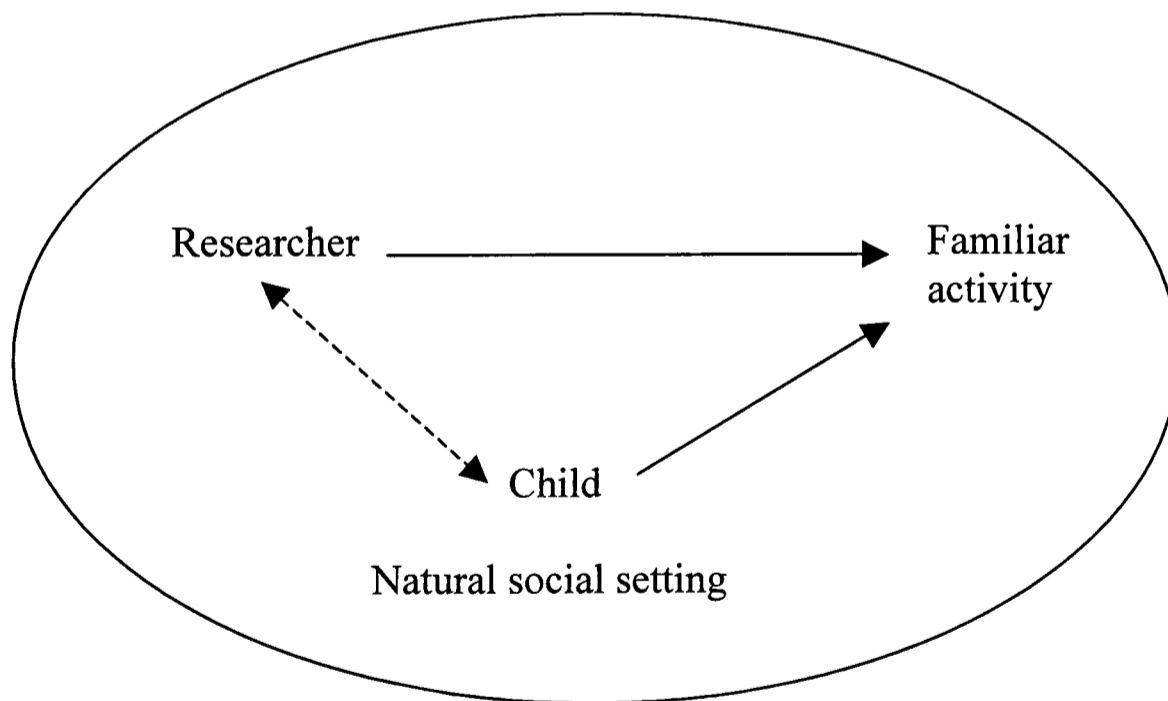
Figure 1: 'Childcentric' research conversation.

Whilst researchers have noted that there is currently a deficit of data collection methods designed specifically for use with children, it should be acknowledged that

methods focused on listening to children talking were commonly used by child-centred researchers and English teachers during the 1970s and early 1980s (for example: Britton 1970, Rosen and Rosen 1973, Tizard and Hughes 1984, Tough 1976, 1977). Indeed the notion of building a relationship through a child – adult – activity triangle was first discussed by Rosen over thirty years ago. She explains:

> I can only aim at making a triangle of myself, the children and the activities outside both of us, but in which we are both involved for different reasons. We must make and do things, paint and stick and cut, go for walks, collect things, feel things and discuss them together. (1967:28)

Through shared participation in the activity, a relationship is developed; one where the adult, as professional, remains in control of the learning context and the child is encouraged to grow and learn through participation in the activity. The importance of the social setting and the adult-child relationship on children's talk was recognised, also in the 1970s, by Labov (1972). Investigating the language of children in ghetto areas, he argues,

> that the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behaviour and that an adult must enter into the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do (1972:202)

Labov used examples of children's talk to illustrate that its quality, and indeed its quantity, is highly dependent on the right social setting and the most comfortable adult-child relationship which can be fostered.

The method designed will now be illustrated by discussing a visit that was made at the beginning of the data collection period. I first met Harry at school at the end of his Reception year when he was five years old. He had been identified as a successful

reader by his class teacher and the initial visit was to ensure that he met the criteria I had identified for inclusion in the study. The second time I met Harry was on a visit to his home the following October. My intention was to talk to Harry about his reading. I wanted to find out, for example, what he liked reading, with whom he liked reading and where he liked reading. I was made very welcome in the home and initially chatted to Harry's mother to start to build a relationship with her. After around thirty minutes I suggested to Harry that he might like to draw a picture of himself reading and told him that I had brought along lots of paper and different types of drawing pencils and pens if he would like to choose some of them to draw with. We chatted while he was engaged in this task and the following conversation is typical of that which took place:

SS   So where do you like reading best? Do you like reading at home or at school?

H   Uh, here.

SS   OK. Do you read in here or do you read upstairs? Or …

H   In here, on the settee.

SS   On the settee, right, can you draw you on the settee? And do you have people with you when you're reading? Mum or Dad or your sister or do you read by yourself?

H   Mum.

SS   You like reading best with your Mum.

H   Yeah, my Mum. It's really my Mum.

SS   Right.

H   Really.

SS   OK, well if you could draw you on the settee with your Mum that would be good.

H   I'm drawing the settee now.

SS   And what type of things do you like reading best? Do you like reading stories or information or ...

H   Stories really.

SS   That's your best, is it?

H   Yeah.

SS   But you do look at information books as well, with your Dad, your Mum was saying.

H   Uh, yeah. We look at information books at school.

SS   Do you?

H   Yeah.

SS   Information books about what? Anything in particular?

H   The body.

SS   Oh, do you? You've been doing about your body. How your body works.

H   Yes.

SS   Have you learnt all about your bones and your teeth?

H   Yeah, and your throat.

(H Harry, SS myself.)

Even this short extract illustrates a number of things about Harry's reading: he enjoys reading at home with his mother, he enjoys story books more than information books, and that he uses non-fiction books at school to learn information about topics he is studying in other curriculum areas.

During the data collection visit described above, Harry and I were in one of his natural social settings; his home. He was engaged in a familiar activity; drawing. This

allowed a relationship to be built between ourselves and facilitated a conversation; we started by chatting about what he was drawing and the conversation developed from there. Involvement in a familiar activity, within the context of a familiar setting, allowed Harry to feel relaxed and comfortable and, I believe, allowed us to talk in an informal way that would not have been possible had the setting or activity been unfamiliar to Harry or had I tried to conduct a more formal interview.

There are four main reasons why the model devised was appropriate for my purposes: the conversations ensured that the boys' voices were heard; the informal nature of the interactions allowed the boys a degree of control over the conversations and ensured that they worked within their cognitive and linguistic capabilities; the use of natural social settings enabled me to enter the boys' worlds and allowed them to feel comfortable and relaxed; and the use of familiar activities allowed a relationship between myself and the boys to be formed. These features will be discussed in turn below, although the areas do have significant overlap.

4.2.2 The central place of the boys' voices

The method designed enabled the boys' voices to be centrally placed and allowed me to see the world from their points of view and to understand their perspectives. In addition to asking the boys' parents and teachers about their reading, I was keen to ask the boys themselves. Children's lives have often been explored through the views and understandings of the adults who care for them, and children have been viewed as 'objects' in this process, rather than as 'subjects' (Christensen and James 2000). Research is therefore often carried out 'on' children, rather than 'with' them. Christensen and James (2000) have identified a paradigm shift in which this has been

reversed; social researchers now consider children to be subjects, rather than objects. This involves a significant shift, to an approach in which children are encouraged to become reflexive interpreters of their own experiences. Children are listened to and their voices are heard and quoted. Greig and Taylor (1999) believe that the child's perspective has only recently been considered and they suggest that listening to the voices and views of children themselves has been one of the most neglected areas of child developmental research. Scott (2000) identifies the former 'adultcentric' bias of social research. She makes the point that the most obvious people to ask about children's lives are children:

> the best people to provide information on the child's perspective are children themselves. Children provide reliable responses if questioned about events that are meaningful to their lives. (2000:99)

Children will usually give reliable information if they are asked about issues that concern them. It seems then, that in order to adequately consider research questions which involve children's experiences and opinions, children have a significant part to play. From an epistemological perspective, it is essential to consult the children who are involved because their words are a significant source of knowledge and understanding.

The boys were encouraged to talk about their experiences and opinions on a subject which is very much a part of their daily lives. They were asked to speak for themselves in an attempt to make the data collection 'childcentric'. Despite their young age, their voices were heard and can be quoted, allowing them a prominent place in the research findings. My role as the professional in the situation was to facilitate this talk; as someone who had a genuine interest in finding out about their

worlds, I shared their conversations and listened carefully to their utterances. I did this by asking questions to initiate relevant discussion, by using verbal and non-verbal behaviour to show that I was interested in what they had to say, and by reflecting their words and phrases back to them to allow them to consider what they had said.

4.2.3 Allowing the boys to control the conversation

Scott (2000) recognises that adults tend to be asked about children's opinions because of concerns regarding young children's abilities to process and respond to structured questions. She suggests that this problem can be overcome if interviews (and questionnaires) are modified for use with children. Specifically, less structured interview methods can be used with young children; whereas responses to structured questions may be restricted by cognitive and language limitations, children can work within their cognitive and linguistic abilities when responding to a less structured situation. Mayall (2000) extends this discussion by suggesting the use of a 'research conversation' which:

> enables one, somewhat, to hand over the agenda to children, so that they can control the pace and direction of the conversation, raising and exploring topics with relatively little researcher input. (2000:133)

I find the notion of a 'research conversation' helpful because it implies the informality of a conversation, while recognising that for research purposes the conversation has to have some focus. The 'research conversation' approach will allow the boys to work within their cognitive and linguistic capabilities and give them a degree of control over the pace and direction of the conversation.

Rather than devising a series of questions to be asked, one after another, I had a 'research agenda' with key areas for discussion. These included, for example, talking about the reading the child enjoyed and his hobbies and interests. This agenda can be illustrated with the following extract from a conversation that took place between myself and Aidan, during my first visit to his home. Having talked with Aidan and his sister about his reading, I wanted to find out more about his interests and hobbies:

A   Susannah, I love maths, and I'm very good at it.

SS   And you're good at maths as well.

A   I'm good at art and drawing.

SS   Well I can tell from your picture.

A   And we've got some friends over the road.

SS   Have you? So you play with them as well.

B   Yeah, me and Aidan like to trade.

A   To trade.

SS   Uh, the Pokemon cards, I see.

A   Not mentioning Digimon. We don't collect Digimon. I can't stand Digimon.

SS   What's the difference?

A   Digimon are trying to take over Pokemon and I just can't stand Digimon. Pokemon stands for pocket monsters.

SS   That's right.

A   And Digimon stands for digital monsters.

SS   Digital monster. I could have guessed that.

(A Aidan, SS myself, B Aidan's sister.)

This extract illustrates Aidan controlling the conversation by introducing new topics and giving me information. From the conversation I was able to discover that he

enjoys maths, art and drawing, trading Pokemon cards, and that he likes Pokemon but not Digimon. Because the topics of conversation had come from Aidan they were obviously within his cognitive and linguistic capabilities and, further, the agenda had come from him.

4.2.4 Entering the boys' worlds

Children's knowledge and understanding develops within social settings, through social interactions. Vygotsky (1978), in his highly influential work, *Mind in Society*, discusses his theory that cognitive functioning has its origins in these social interactions. Children operate from within a social setting and they naturally communicate and attempt to make sense of their social world with others, within the cultural context in which they are based. Vygotsky's work implies a constructivist, rather than a positivist, approach to research. In a constructivist approach the child is perceived to be 'a subjective, contextual, self-determining and dynamic being', whereas in a positivist approach children are perceived to be 'determined, knowable, objective, measurable' (Greig and Taylor 1999:35). In a constructivist approach the researcher attempts to understand the child's world by entering it and by 'describing and analysing the contextualised social phenomena found there', whereas in a positivist approach the researcher prefers to use quantitative, experimental methods utilising numerical data and statistics (1999:37). The constructivist approach is implied from Vygotsky's work since it recognises that children operate from within a social and cultural context and that they are dynamic within this. Indeed, Vygotsky himself preferred to observe children in their natural settings, which was in contrast to the standardised, laboratory, experimental tasks which were fashionable at the time;

Vygotsky argued that since children's knowledge and understanding develops within a social setting, this is where children should be observed.

The natural social settings that I used were the home and the school. Working within these settings allowed me to enter the child's world and witness the social and cultural context in which each child operated and developed his knowledge and understanding. This constructivist approach is particularly significant when examining a social practice such as literacy; since reading and writing are essentially social practices, it is vital to recognise the social and cultural contexts in which they take place. Working within these settings has other advantages too. Firstly they are familiar for the boys and, therefore, allow them to feel relaxed and comfortable. Secondly they enable the boys to exercise a degree of power. Since our interactions took place on their 'territory' rather than on mine, they had knowledge about the settings that I did not have; for example, knowledge about certain practices and routines.

4.2.5 Building effective relationships

A significant factor affecting the quality of data collected is the relationship made between the researcher and the participants. Social research is founded on social relationships. Christensen and James (2000) comment,

> In research with children, forming relationships in which children feel that they want to participate throughout the research process is particularly important in order to keep up a continuing dialogue over which children, as well as researchers, feel they have control. (2000:5)

When working with children, a relationship should be fostered which allows the child to enjoy and to feel in some control of the research process. Potential difficulties in relationships between adult researchers and child participants are discussed by Mayall (2000) and focus on the traditionally unequal power and status between adults and children. Children are used to adults having power over them; however, this causes difficulties in a research relationship where the power needs to be shared so that the children can speak freely. Mayall comments that,

> researchers face great challenges in finding ways to break down the power
>
> imbalance between adults and children, and in creating space which enables
>
> children to speak up and be heard. (2000:136-7)

Mayall recognises that ways of giving the researcher and the child equal power and creating spaces for children to speak must be found. Greig and Taylor (1999) suggest that when conducting research with younger children, the researcher is required 'to enter the world with which the child is familiar – the world of stories, dolls, puppets, sand and drawing' (1999:64-5). Shared participation in such activities can create ways in which power can be shared and spaces for talk can be made.

Shared participation in a familiar activity represents an attempt to build an effective relationship with each child. By ensuring that the activity is enjoyable, and is part of the boys' everyday world, my intention is to make the boys feel comfortable and in control of the process, and to create spaces in which they can talk in a relaxed manner. Two of the activities suggested by Greig and Taylor will be used; stories (and other types of books) and drawings. Both activities will allow the boys and me to talk in a relaxed, easy manner, and, I hope, go some way towards enabling each one of us to

feel empowered and comfortable. The conversation could focus on the book or the drawing initially, then move on to other areas initiated by myself or the boys.

4.2.6 Difficulties with creating an equal power dynamic

There are of course difficulties with the above method, even though I had designed a data collection method in which myself and the child had equal power in the interaction. As discussed above, steps were taken to give the boys the opportunity to talk freely; the interactions took place in the child's world whilst engaged in a child-friendly activity, the child was encouraged to control the conversation and his voice was central in the process. It would, however, be unrealistic to believe that this created an 'interaction of equals'.

Britton (1970) argues that adult-child relationships are not reciprocal. Britton cites Winnicott who, in discussing social worker – client relationships, recognises that for the social worker this has to be a professional relationship, whilst for the client it is a personal relationship. Britton explains that the social worker creates 'a limited and reliable environment for his client', whilst 'the client puts of himself into it' (1970:183). The researcher-child respondent relationship can be described in a similar way. For the researcher it is a professional relationship; s/he sets up the environment and controls the external conditions to elicit relevant data. For the child respondent, however, it is a personal relationship; s/he gives personal details about experiences and thoughts. For the researcher, the interaction is a professional 'research conversation' which can only be unstructured up to a point. Since the researcher has an agenda, the conversation sometimes has to be re-focused back to this, rather than

being allowed to continue naturally. In this situation, the researcher takes professional control of the conversation, and, as such, directs the interaction.

The unequal power dynamic can be illustrated be examining transcripts of my conversations with the boys. In those reproduced above, all of the questions are asked by the researcher, and this was the trend in all of the interactions. The researcher asks all of the questions, and hence leads the conversation so the power remains with the researcher. It should, however, also be noted that many of these questions were to keep the conversation flowing. Many of the other utterances reflect back the boys' comments. There were occasions when the boys did ask me questions, illustrating their growing sense of ease. In the conversation about Pokemon with Aidan, the following dialogue also took place when he showed me some Pokemon characters he had made:

A   Do you recognise this one?

SS   Pokemon. Oh Pokemon, is that Pikachu?

A   Yeah, well done. Do you recognise?

SS   I only know Pokemon and Pikachu. Uh, a fish, who is it?

A   Medapod.

SS   Who?

A   Medapod.

SS   Medapod.

(A Aidan, SS myself.)

In this extract of conversation, Aidan has taken control because he senses he is more knowledgeable than I am and enjoys testing me; he has taken on the role of teacher, and I am clearly being examined on my (limited) knowledge of Pokemon characters!

4.2.7 Ethical considerations

Obtaining informed consent from such young children themselves can be difficult. Researchers must take responsibility for explaining the nature of the research clearly to children, at a level they can understand, and checking that the children have understood the implications of becoming involved. Roberts (2000) recognises that it is difficult for young children to say that they do not want to take part in research, so she suggests that participation in research should be in the child's interests and should be fun for the child:

> I believe that there is an onus on us to make participation in research, at whatever level, an experience which is at best fun, and at worst, does no harm, to young people. (2000:238)

Roberts points out that the time children spend participating in research is a 'gift' to the researcher and that this can be reciprocated by the researcher; the researcher can ensure that participation is enjoyable, and not a chore, for the children.

I attempted to address the issue of informed consent in a number of ways. The children knew why I working with them; I told them they had been pointed out to me by their teachers because they were good readers. The children were told that they could choose whether to work with me or not; I asked them whether they wanted to be involved and told them that they could change their mind at any time. When I first met each child I explained the research in a way I hoped they could understand and I checked this understanding by asking them to explain it to someone else. Finally in an attempt to take Roberts' position on board, I attempted to ensure that the time I spent with the boys was enjoyable for them.

Another ethical consideration is to ensure that anonymity and confidentiality are maintained. All of the boys' names, except one, have been changed in the writing up of the study to ensure that the boys and their families remain anonymous. In one case, the parents agreed to the boy's request that his real name be used. Care has therefore been taken to ensure that no additional information is given which would make him identifiable.

4.3 Data collection activities

Using the three data collection methods discussed above, activities were planned for the home and school visits and these evolved throughout the data collection period. Rather than being planned at the beginning, the activities built on data as it emerged over the two year period. The following data collection activities were carried out for each of the boys:

Observation

Home

Observation of the home environment, particularly noting evidence of literacy practices in the home (Year 1);

Observation of a parent reading with his/her son, particularly examining the interaction between the parent, the son and the text (Year 1).

School

Observation of the classroom/school environment, particularly noting how literacy is explicitly and implicitly portrayed (Year 1);

Observation of a reading/literacy lesson, particularly the boy's involvement and level of challenge in each part of the lesson (Year 1 and Year 2).

Research Conversations

Home

Initial conversation with the boy's mother and/or father to get to know the family and the boy's early history (general and reading) (Year 1);

Conversation with the boy about his home reading, including what he likes to read, where he likes to read, who he reads with, how much time he spends reading, and where his reading materials come from. Facilitate this by asking the boy to draw a picture showing an enjoyable reading experience (Year 1);

Conversation with the boy about his reading preferences. Facilitate this by looking at a range of books together (Year 2);

Conversation with the boy about why he likes reading and the range of things he reads at home. Facilitate this by engaging in a list-making activity together (Year 2);

Final conversation with the mother and/or father asking them to reflect on their son's reading (strengths and preferences) and why they think he became a successful reader (Year 2);

Conversation with the boy about why he thinks he became a successful reader (Year 2).

School

Conversation with the teacher about the boy's reading in school, including what he reads, who he reads to/with, how much time he spends reading, when he was identified as being a successful reader and whether any additional provision has been made as a result of this (Year 1);

Conversation with the boy about his school reading, including what he reads, who he reads to/with, how much time he spends reading, whether or not he is better at reading than his friends and how he feels about this. Facilitate this by reading the boy's school

reading book together (Year 1);

Conversation with the teacher about what provision is made for more able readers and for boy readers, including whether or not they teach critical literacy (Year 2).

Documentary Analysis

Home

Reading diary kept by the boys' parents (Year 1);

Reading log kept by the boys (Year 2).

School

School policy documents, including reading/English policy, SEN/more able policy (Year 1);

The boy's formative reading records (Years 1 and 2);

The boy's summative reading records, including baseline assessment, end-of-year assessments/records, standardised assessment tasks (SATs) results (Years 1 and 2).

There was one further activity I wanted to carry out which could not be categorised under the above headings:

Reading a book with each boy; carrying out a 'reading conference' (informally) using a book chosen by the boy. Notes would be made on the boy's 'Reading with accuracy, fluency and sense of meaning' and 'Understanding and response' (DfEE/QCA 1998) (Year 1).

Although this is more formal than any of the other activities, I felt that it was important that I was familiar with each boy's reading competencies.

4.3.1 Conversation prompt sheets/observation schedules

For many of the above activities, I had prompt sheets/schedules which were designed to ensure that the data collection activities stayed focused on the research questions. Many of these were piloted before the final versions were used. For example, the prompt sheet for the initial conversation with the parents was piloted over Summer 2000 with two people I knew who had successful boy readers, and the classroom observation schedule was piloted during Autumn 2000 before being used for the study observations. In fact, the classroom observation schedule was significantly altered as a result of the pilot. I had originally anticipated having a chart with behaviours to observe and tally, such as how often the boy responded to or asked a question. However, I found it difficult to record this whilst the lesson was in progress due to the pace of the lesson. Hence I devised a more open observation schedule for use during the lesson, and the identification of particular behaviours became part of the post-observation evaluation and analysis.

The following final versions of the prompt sheets/schedules can be found in the appendices:

Prompt sheet for initial conversation with parents: Appendix 1;

Prompt sheet for conversation with Year 1 teachers: Appendix 2;

Classroom observation schedule: Appendix 3;

Parent/child reading interaction observation schedule: Appendix 4;

Prompt sheet for conversation with Year 2 teachers: Appendix 5.

In addition, the books shown to the boys when discussing their preferences are listed in Appendix 6, the instructions given to the parents for completing the reading diaries

are in Appendix 7 and the instructions given to the boys for completing the reading logs are in Appendix 8.

I did not have prompt sheets for my conversations with the boys; these conversations were facilitated by an activity (as discussed in section 4.2.1) and I knew the focus for these conversations. As noted above, the activities which facilitated the conversations with the boys included drawing a picture, looking at a range of books, engaging in a list-making activity and reading a school book.

All of the conversations were recorded and then transcribed by a professional administrator; I then checked the transcripts myself. During each observation I made notes and typed these up as soon as possible after the observation.

4.4 Selecting the boys

One of the earliest empirical tasks was to identify six young successful boy readers with whom to work. The most suitable way to select boys seemed to be criterion-based selection. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explain this as follows:

> Criterion-based selection requires that the researcher establish in advance a set of criteria or list of attributes that the units for study must possess. The investigator then searches for exemplars that match the specified array of characteristics. (1984:73)

This selection method seemed appropriate for my task; in order to select six boys I needed to establish my own set of criteria. Boys who displayed the specified criteria or attributes could be identified and included in the study.

4.4.1 Selection criteria

It was necessary to identify the criteria which would be used to select the six boys. These criteria would indicate whether a child was a successful reader at the end of the Reception year (the decision to choose boys of this age will be discussed in the following section). I intended using the criteria to select six boys from all those suggested by teachers. Reception class teachers were asked to identify boys who were particularly able readers; significantly above their peers and above where a child of that age would be expected to be. I felt able to trust the teachers' professional ability to identify specific boys; they were all qualified teachers and would have an understanding of what the description meant. In addition, they knew the children well and could select boys more reliably then I, a stranger to the children, could have done. Even so, it was nevertheless important that I visited the children whose names had been put forward and checked the teachers' judgements against my own set of criteria. Assessment is not an exact science; when assessments are carried out, some type of moderation process is required, both within school and between schools. A successful reader is a subjective concept and a child perceived by one teacher to be a successful reader may not be perceived in this way by another teacher, particularly given the wide social, economic and cultural backgrounds of the children in Birmingham schools. The following set of five criteria would be used to moderate the teachers' judgements:

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

- Is eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

In order to identify the above criteria three documents were referred to. The first of these was *The Primary Language Record* (Barrs et al 1988). The second document was *Individual Assessment of Children's Reading Development Throughout the Primary Years* (Winchester 1995); this document is known locally in Birmingham as the 'positive statement banks', from the document's sub-title, 'Positive statement banks providing a framework to support teachers in assessing and recording reading development and in planning the reading curriculum'. The final document referred to was the booklet *English tasks: Teacher's handbook* (DfEE/QCA 1998) which provides instructions for teachers administering the 1999 Key Stage 1 SATs for reading at Levels 1 and 2. This refers to levels from the Department for Education's (DfE) (1995) *Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum*. These documents were chosen because they clearly identify levels of reading attainment.

For the children to be identified 'successful readers' at the end of Reception, I felt they had to achieve, as a minimum, the following levels suggested by the above documents:

- Level 1 of *Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum;*

- The Emergent Reader level from *Individual Assessment of Children's Reading Development Throughout the Primary Years;*

- Level 2 of *The Primary Language Record.*

(Details of each of these can be found in Appendix 9.)

I had a clear rationale for choosing these particular levels. The DfEE/QCA (1999) state that the average child should be working at National Curriculum Level 2 by the

end of Key Stage One, when they have reached or are approaching their seventh birthday. Since the children being selected were two years younger, I did not feel that they necessarily had to meet this level because I had deliberately decided to work with children who were above average but not exceptional or 'gifted'. To achieve Level 2 at the end of Reception would, I feel, have made them exceptional. I therefore decided that the children had to achieve a minimum of Level 1. The DfEE/QCA (1998) document does categorise Level 2 into grades a, b and c, with 2a being the most advanced. It is therefore possible that some boys chosen for this study might achieve Level 2c by the end of Reception (also detailed in Appendix 9).

Winchester (1995) states that the early levels in the *Individual Assessment of Children's Reading Development Throughout the Primary Years* document correspond to the National Curriculum levels as follows:

The Foundation Reader is working *towards* Level 1.

The Emergent Reader is working *at* National Curriculum Level 1.

The Apprentice Reader is working *at* National Curriculum Level 2.

I therefore chose the Emergent Reader level to complement the above decision that the children should be working at National Curriculum Level 1. The document states that this level emerges during Reception and Year One. This supports the above decision since it is likely that the most able children will achieve this in Reception and the less able children will achieve this in Year One.

The Primary Language Record (Barrs et al 1988) does not make reference to National Curriculum levels since it was produced prior to the DfE (1995) document. Whilst the authors are reluctant to prescribe ages to the levels, the document does indicate that by

the end of Key Stage One children should be at least at Level 3. Again, since this is two years away for the children being visited, Level 2 was chosen and felt to be appropriate.

Having examined the content of the three documents at the levels discussed, the above criteria were identified for this study. These were chosen using the following rationale.

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

All three of the documents require the child to read a simple text largely independently, although some support is permissible, particularly with unfamiliar texts.

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

All of the documents emphasise the importance of the child understanding what is being read. I also felt it important that the child seemed to enjoy the reading experience.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

All of the documents mention the ability to read words by employing a number of strategies, including recognising familiar words, using knowledge of letter sounds and using other cues such as the illustrations. I also felt that it would be useful if the child could start to articulate the strategies he is able to employ and felt that this was possible since there is currently an emphasis in schools on teaching children to use meta-language when discussing books and reading.

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

- Is eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Winchester's document is more extensive than the other two and refers to three wider issues: enjoying reading experiences, having favourite books and authors, and making a personal response to what has been read. I wanted to include these three areas since I felt they encompassed the breadth of the reading experience rather than focusing on the reading of a particular book.

I hoped that the identification of these specific criteria, the clarity of the criteria against which the boys were selected and the reference to levels which had been formulated by experts in the field would make the selection process valid and reliable.

A further issue which needed consideration was the choice of books the children were presented with when I visited them. Having identified the need for them to be working at Level 1 of the National Curriculum, I looked at the Level 1 SATs books in the DfEE/QCA (1998) document. Whilst I did not compare my choice of books formally with these, I was familiar with many of the Level 1 SATs books and believed that the books I had chosen were similar to these. The DfEE/QCA give the following list of features they use when selecting books:

- interesting subject matter and setting which may either be related to the child's own experience or extend beyond their knowledge of everyday life;

- a clear viewpoint, with accessible themes and ideas;

- clarity of expression and use of language which benefits from reading aloud and re-reading;

- language with recognisable repetitive patterns, rhyme and rhythm;

- straightforward characterisation and plot;

- the use of a variety of narrative and organisational techniques;

- illustrations which are visually stimulating and enhance the words of the text;

- clear presentation of information. (1998:10)

The books I chose were ones I considered good quality texts and they exhibited many of the above features. I chose twelve books and included a range of fiction, poetry and information books. I deliberately chose some books which were likely to be present in the boys' classrooms to give them the opportunity of choosing a familiar book if they preferred to do this. The reason for giving them the opportunity to choose a familiar book was because the documents used above to identify the selection criteria emphasised that at this level children are only likely to be confident readers with familiar texts and likely to need more support with unfamiliar ones. The books which were presented to the children are listed in Appendix 10.

4.4.2 Selection process

In order to identify six boys who met the above criteria, I wrote to the headteachers of thirty schools. I required six successful boy readers whose schools and families were willing to work with me. I intended to follow these six boys from the beginning of Year 1 (age range 5.1 to 6.0 years in September) to the end of Year 2 (age range 6.11 to 7.10 years in July). The decision to start working with boys of this age was taken because they would have already been in school for a year and could therefore be identified as successful readers with a degree of reliability. It would have been difficult to identify successful readers at the beginning of the Reception year; at this

stage, variety in reading performance is closely related to pre-school experience. Children would not have had an equal opportunity to achieve in reading at this stage. Following the boys for two years would allow a deep picture of their reading experiences to be built up and would enable their achievements in the standard assessment tasks (SATs), taken at the end of Year 2 in 2002, to be included in the data. The decision to work with six boys was taken because it was estimated that the size of the study would allow the data from six boys to be written up. The relatively small number of cases was consistent with the research approach discussed previously; an approach adopting multiple case study and ethnographic methods which requires 'thick description' and is based on depth of data, rather than breadth. It was also noted that in previous multiple case studies, Fry (1985), Minns (1990) and Fox (1993) involved five or six children (section 3.2.1).

The initial letter to headteachers asked them to reply if they were willing to take part and had at least one boy suitable for inclusion in the project. In addition the letter asked the headteacher to obtain parental consent for the child to be considered and another letter was included for the school to pass on to the parents for this purpose. (Copies of the letter sent to headteachers and the letter for parents are in Appendix 11.) I received fourteen replies in total; twelve suggesting at least one appropriate boy and two acknowledging my letter, but saying that they were unable to take part at that time. I then visited the schools in the order that I had received the replies and met the boys whose names had been put forward by the Reception class teachers. I decided to select a maximum of two children in one school so that at least four different schools were involved. I then spent time with each boy and identified those who met the selection criteria.

On each initial visit I spent between 20 and 40 minutes with each boy, largely dependent on the time available in the school timetable. Each visit followed a similar format. I introduced myself to the boy and told him that I was interested in how children become good readers. I then told him that his teacher had told me that he was a good reader so I would like to talk to him about his reading and read with him. I asked if this was OK. I then asked whether he liked reading and, if so, what he liked reading, encouraging discussion about story and information books. I told the boy that I had brought along a selection of my favourite books and that, if it was OK with him, we would look at them together. I then showed him the selection of books I had bought along, briefly introducing each one and encouraging the boy to say if he was familiar with the book or another one like it. I asked the boy to choose his favourite book from the selection for us to read together. We then read the book together. The format for this initial encounter varied according to the boy's ability and motivation. If the boy was reading the text independently I kept quiet, whereas if he was struggling I read parts of the text with him. In all cases, however, I encouraged the boy to talk about the pictures and to make a personal response relevant to the text. I also asked some questions about reading strategies, such as 'how did you know that said 'giant'?' At the end of this time I thanked the boy for sharing the book with me and said that I had enjoyed reading it with him. I told the boy he was indeed a very good reader and took him back to his teacher.

I did not make notes during the session since I felt that this would have disturbed the relaxed atmosphere I was trying to create; I wanted to create an enjoyable reading experience and not make the boy feel that I was 'testing' him. This did mean that I

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had to make notes as quickly as possible after the visit and this often happened in the school car park. At home, I was then able to write up my notes and reflect on whether each boy had met the selection criteria adequately.

Having identified six boys who did meet the selection criteria, I then contacted their parents, by telephone, letter or e-mail as they had requested, and asked if they would give permission for their son to be included in the study (the initial letter had only asked permission to consider them for inclusion in the study and had not committed them to becoming involved). At this stage I clearly explained what their commitment would be. I particularly checked that they were planning on being in the area for two years and that they were happy for me to visit the family at home. All six agreed to take part and so at this point I had the six cases I required.

I then contacted the headteachers who had replied but whose schools I had not yet visited, and the parents and teachers of boys I had visited in school but not selected. I was particularly concerned to carry out these tasks sensitively for two reasons. Firstly, from an ethical perspective, it is important to consider the effects of the research project on everyone involved; this includes those people on the sidelines as well as the main participants. It was therefore crucial that the feelings of these people were considered and that they were provided with prompt, appropriate feedback. Secondly, it was important that I did not jeopardise the relationship between a school and the university department in which I am based. If I had offended a headteacher or teacher, by neglecting to provide appropriate feedback, this could have had a negative effect on the relationship between the school and the university department. I contacted headteachers with a telephone call and ensured that I talked to them personally. I

thanked them for replying and explained that I had visited the schools in the order I had received the replies and that I had the number of cases I required before getting to their school. Regarding the parents of boys I had seen but not selected, I wrote to them and said that I was not able to use their son, but that I had enjoyed meeting him and that he was an excellent reader for his age. I thanked them for letting me visit their son and wished their son luck in his future at school. Regarding the teachers of boys I had seen but not selected, I contacted them personally with a telephone call and, similarly, explained that I was not able to use the boy in their class, but that I had enjoyed meeting him and that he was an excellent reader for his age. I thanked the teacher for allowing me to come into their classroom and for the time they had taken with me.

I hoped that the selection process had addressed the ethical issue of informed consent. I tried to ensure informed consent was obtained from headteachers and teachers by stating clearly in my initial letter what I was doing, why I was doing it, what they would gain from becoming involved and what commitment would be required from them. I tried to ensure informed consent was obtained from the parents by, again, stating clearly in my initial letter and follow-up contact what I was doing, why I was doing it and what commitment would be required from them. I was particularly keen to ensure that the parents knew what was happening in these early stages, since I was meeting their son at school; I did not visit a boy in school without parental consent so that I knew the parents had received my letter explaining what I was doing and that they could have contacted me for further information had they chosen to do so. It was acknowledged previously that it is important to build up good relationships with children's 'gatekeepers', i.e. their parents and teachers. I hoped that I had made a

positive start to these relationships by communicating effectively and by keeping everyone clearly informed. In addition I made sure that I was reliable. All of the visits were carried out on the dates and times arranged; I did not have to cancel any and I was not late for any.

Obtaining informed consent from the boys was much more difficult. As discussed above (section 4.2.7), I tried to explain why I was visiting them in a way that they could understand. I told each boy that I was interested in how children become good readers and that his teacher had told me he was a good reader so I would like to talk to him about his reading and read with him. I then asked if this was OK. (At this stage I was only seeking consent for the initial session. I did not mention the subsequent visits since this would only have been relevant to those children who were selected and at this stage I did not know which children these would be.) It is probably significant that not one boy said it was not OK. It can be difficult to obtain informed consent from children given the unequal power and status relations between children and adults; children can feel that they should agree to an adult request. In addition to my status as an adult, the boys knew that their teachers were happy for them to work with me, since the teacher had sent them out of the classroom with me. Whilst this made me an 'authorised' adult who had been approved by the teacher, it might also have made it more difficult for the child to refuse a request sanctioned by their teacher. It was acknowledged previously that, given the difficulty in obtaining informed consent from children, research with children should be fun (section 4.2.7). I tried to do this and hoped that the boys would have regarded the initial meeting as an informal 'looking at books and having a chat' session, rather than as a formal assessment situation.

The results of the selection process are in Appendix 12. I also visited six boys who were not selected for the study. These children were largely characterised by recognising many high frequency words but not having the skills and strategies required for decoding unknown words, either at all or quickly enough to keep the reading fluent.

4.4.3 Biographical details of the boys

Detailed biographies of the six boys are in Appendix 13. All of the boys are white and all have English as their first language. I sent my initial letter to thirty schools randomly and these included schools with majority white and majority non-white populations. I visited the schools in the order they contacted me and the first to contact me were schools with majority white school populations. It should, however, be noted that the schools varied in terms of the socio-economic background of the majority of the families. This is evident in the discussion of parental levels of education below. Four schools are involved in the study since Harry and Timo are at the same school, and Barnaby and Joe are at the same school; in both cases, the boys are in parallel classes rather than the same class.

A number of factors from the biographies are worthy of discussion. Firstly, the ages of the children. Children are often considered at an advantage if they have birthdays at the beginning of the academic year; within any academic year there may be children almost a year apart in age, and this can make a significant difference to their levels of development and maturity, particularly in the earliest years. Looking at the birth dates of the six case study boys, it is interesting to note that they are evenly distributed over

the year. Two boys have birthdays in the Autumn term (Joe and Timo), two have birthdays in the Spring term (Aidan and Harry) and two have birthdays in the Summer term (Barnaby and Jacob). Hence Timo, the eldest boy, is 11 and a half months older than Jacob, the youngest.

Secondly, it is interesting to look at the number of children in each family and the position of the case study boys:

Aidan	Second of two
Barnaby	Eldest of three
Harry	Elder of two
Jacob	Elder of two
Joe	Second of three
Timo	Eldest of three

Three families have two children and three have three children. Four of the boys are the first-born and two are second-born. It therefore appears that there are no cross-case similarities in either the number of children in each family, or the position of the case study boys. Wells (1985) distinguished between children with 'close' or 'no close' siblings, close being less than three years apart, because he believed that the more important factors were 'the age-gaps involved, whether the particular child spends most of his or her time with an older or younger sibling, and how much undivided attention is received from parents' (Wells 1985:85). In the case study boys, Jacob is the only child who has a sibling with an age gap greater than three years, his brother being five years younger than him, although Harry and Timo were both aged three years when their younger siblings were born. This means that three of the boys were single children for at least the first three years of their lives and would therefore

have had undivided parental attention during this time. The other three boys had siblings with an age gap of less than three years and therefore spent all or most of their time with older and/or younger siblings. Again, no cross-case similarities seem to emerge from this analysis; three boys having siblings with an age gap of three years or more, and three boys having older and/or younger siblings with an age gap of less than three years.

The third factor for discussion is the level of parental education. In three families, both parents attended higher education and hold degree level qualifications (Barnaby, Joe, Timo). In one case, the father also holds a doctoral degree (Joe). In one family, one parent has A-levels and professional marketing qualifications and one has nine O-levels (Aidan), and in two families both parents left school aged sixteen years with 'a few CSEs' (Harry, Jacob). Parental level of qualification therefore differs greatly between the case study boys and cannot be regarded as a significant factor in their reading achievements.

4.5 Data analysis

The majority of the data, collected over a two year period, are qualitative and were analysed using a form of content analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that qualitative data are in the form of words, and that the words are based on observation, interviews or documents. They recommend that, as a preparation for analysis, the observations should be converted into 'write-ups' and the interviews should be transcribed, so that the texts are clear and can be manipulated:

> So we are focusing on *words* as the basic medium and are assuming that the

words involved have been refined from raw notes or tape recordings into a text that is clear to the reader or analyst. (1994:51)

As noted above (section 4.3.1), in this study the research conversations were transcribed and the observation notes were typed up. Once the data has been presented in an accessible way, the content analysis can begin. Initially the data are read through several times and notes, comments, observations, and queries are jotted down in the margins (Merriam 1988).

The first significant stage of the analysis process is category construction and code generation; chunks or units of meaning are identified in the data and these are labelled with a code. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that units of meaning may be as short as a sentence or may be longer than a paragraph, but they should be able to stand alone, i.e. contain a discrete point and be understandable without additional information. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that:

> *Codes* are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to "chunks" of varying size – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs.
> (1994:56)

Codes should be words or phrases which reflect the essence of the unit's meaning. Categories and codes can be devised in two ways. They may be devised inductively, whereby the data suggests the units of meanings and subsequent codes, or they may be devised in advance of scrutinising the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest having a start-list of codes. They explain,

> That list comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to

the study. (1994:58)

The start-list is then applied to the data. In the data analysis for this study, I devised a start-list using the research questions, the theoretical frameworks, and the on-going analysis which occurred throughout the two year data collection period. However, it was also important to remain open-minded so that potential themes in the data which were not anticipated could emerge inductively. An example of a category which was not in the start-list and which emerged inductively was the category 'boys as teachers in the classroom: modelling and scaffolding other children's learning' (see appendix 15). I had not anticipated this category yet it emerged strongly from the data.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest that categories should be developed with four guidelines in mind; categories are likely to be significant if a large number of people mention something or something occurs frequently in the data, if the audience is likely to consider something important, if something is unique, and if features are revealed which are 'areas of inquiry not otherwise recognised' or which 'provide unique leverage on an otherwise common problem' (1981:95). I found these guidelines helpful since they allow for categories which include both frequently-occurring data and data which occurred only rarely but which are worthy of discussion. An example of a category containing frequently-occurring data is 'resources available in the home' and an example of a category which did not have a considerable amount of data, but which I believe to be worthy of discussion, is 'influence of peers' at school (see appendices 14 and 15).

Once the data has been categorised and coded, coded chunks of data can be grouped into 'sets, themes, or constructs'; Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to this grouping

as 'pattern coding'. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explain that the researcher is searching for regularities and patterns, in an attempt to establish linkages and relationships. The researcher is guided by theoretical assumptions, both explicit (informed by the theoretical frameworks) and implicit (informed by the researcher's preferences, culture and training). Miles and Huberman (1994) recognise this choice as a significant part of the analytic process:

> The researcher's decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which patterns best summarise a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell – are all analytic choices. (1994:11)

The researcher scrutinises the data for recurring words, phrases and themes in the coding, and these become the first provisional categories. Initially, the researcher may have 30-50 categories. These are then scrutinised for further connections, patterns and relationships so that categories can be combined and clustered, and eventually a manageable number of significant categories is identified. In the data analysis for this study, pattern coding resulted in twelve categories for the analysis of data from the boys' homes and sixteen categories for the analysis of data from the boys' schools. These categories can be found in appendices 14 and 15 respectively.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest writing 'rules for inclusion' for each category. These are written as propositions, and units of meaning (on data cards) are considered according to whether they support the proposition or not:

> The rule for inclusion is stated as a proposition that summarizes the meaning contained in the data cards. Data cards that on closer examination do not fit the resulting rule are categorised elsewhere. Remaining data are now included in or excluded from a category based on its rule for inclusion (1994:142)

This process helps the researcher move beyond the descriptive to the analytical level; the content of each category is used to devise research propositions. Bassey (1999) suggests drafting 'analytic statements' which are potential 'answers' to the research questions. I found this exercise helpful; an example of an analytic statement devised was 'boys are influenced by what their fathers and grandfathers read'. Data which supports this statement will be discussed in chapter 6 and the statement forms the basis for one of the chapter conclusions. Devising rules for inclusion or analytic statements begins to reveal what is being learnt from the data and will lead towards the research outcomes.

After unitising, categorising and coding, the next stage in the analysis process is theorising. Speculation is used to develop theory. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explain that speculation,

> permits the investigator to go beyond the data and make guesses about what will happen in the future, based on what has been learned in the past about constructs and linkages among them and on comparisons between that knowledge and what presently is known about the same phenomena. These guesses are projections about how confidently the relationships found or explanations developed can be expected to obtain in the future. (1984:173)

Speculation involves making inferences and producing 'research constructs'. It involves testing hunches against the data: some will hold firm whilst others will not. It also involves moving from concrete to abstract levels of thinking to develop a theory to explain the data's meaning. This theory should make reference to the existing theoretical frameworks the researcher is working within. One way in which I attempt to develop theory is by constructing the identity of the young successful boy reader.

In chapter 2, it was seen that contemporary post-structural feminist theorists have recently started to recognise that there may be masculinities in which reading is acceptable. I hope that constructing the identity of the young successful boy reader will make a valuable contribution to theory on masculinities and reading.

At this stage the robustness of the conclusions has to be considered. Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that,

> The meanings emerging from the data have to be *tested* for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'confirmability' – that is, their *validity.*
>
> (their italics) (1994:11)

The conclusions should be tested against the data: the data must be scrutinised for evidence which supports the conclusions and for evidence which negates the conclusion, so-called 'negative evidence'. It is easy to notice only the evidence which supports the conclusions; however, it is important to also recognise the evidence that does not support them. Conclusions are generally accepted if they are derived from 'a substantial accumulation of positive instances' (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). An example of an initial conclusion which had negative evidence was 'teachers use targeted questioning to challenge the boys during literacy lessons'. Whilst teachers had talked about using this strategy in their conversations with me, the observations showed a considerable amount of negative evidence; that this strategy was not widely used in practice. The initial conclusion therefore had to be revised.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest four methods of addressing issues of validity and reliability. Firstly, multiple methods of data collection; a theme which emerges from the interviews/conversations, observations and documents is likely to be a

strongly credible one. I drew from all of the data when discussing the results and conclusions were frequently supported by data collected from more than one method; for example, conversation and observation, observation and documentary evidence. Secondly, building an 'audit trail'; explicitly outlining the methods used allows other people to understand the processes involved. I hope that the two methodology chapters and the appendices which support this chapter have made the approaches and methods adopted in this study explicit. Thirdly, working with a research team; an individual researcher increases likelihood of bias. Although I have been working alone on this project, I have had research supervisors who have been able to view the data from a more objective stance. Finally, member checks; asking research participants whether their experience is accurately described (Lincoln and Guba 1985). At various points during the writing up of the results, I sent sections to the boys' parents and asked them for their comments. Unfortunately, although they did correct factual errors, they tended not to comment on my analyses of the boys' reading.

The final part of the analytic process is the writing up of the research. I used the process of analysis described above to identify areas for discussion. Each area will be discussed using data from all six of the boys and will include the presentation of a significant amount of empirical data; it is vital that important and valuable parts of the data are not lost in the unitising, categorising and coding process, and that extensive use is made of the primary data, particularly the participants' words, when writing up the findings. Each area discussed will also refer to existing theoretical frameworks. After the results have been presented, the significance of the findings will be examined.

4.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has described the data which will be collection and analysis for this study. The data will be qualitative rather than quantitative. It is my belief that the strength and value of qualitative data lies in its differences from quantitative data. Firstly, human beings are not robots; the complexities of human beings, and of carrying out research into a unique individual's actions and thoughts, cannot be easily quantified, and an attempt to reduce the data to a quantifiable form would be to lose the truths which come from the peculiarities and the uniqueness found in qualitative data (discussed in section 3.2.1). Secondly, it is not necessary for all researchers to come to the same conclusions from a set of data or a repeated study. Researchers come to the data with preconceptions; they conduct research because the area interests them and because they have some experience in the area; hence, the findings that do emerge will be related to the individual researcher's interests and experiences. Different researchers may therefore present different conclusions from a given set of data, and this is acceptable as long as all of the conclusions have addressed issues of validity and reliability. Qualitative methods were deliberately chosen for this study because I believe that they will address the research questions in a deeper way; the interesting and significant findings from this study will be found in the depth of data, the 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), rather than in adding up the most frequent utterances and offering a quantitative data approach.

Having presented the detail of how the data is to be collected and analysed, this study will now proceed to the presentation of the results. The next two chapters will use the data which was collected and analysed in an attempt to address the questions posed at

the end of chapter 2: What are the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of young successful boy readers? What are the reading habits and preferences of young successful boy readers? What patterns emerge in the reading experience of young successful boy readers?

Chapter 5: The boys' reading experiences and behaviours

In chapter 1, experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers were identified from the literature on children's reading. These features were categorised into experiences associated with the home, behaviours associated with the child and experiences associated with the school. At the end of chapter 2, the following research questions were posed: What are the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of young successful boy readers? What are the reading habits and preferences of young successful boy readers? What patterns emerge in the reading experience of young successful boy readers? In this chapter, the data collected from the six boys will be examined in an attempt to address these questions. Specifically in this chapter, I want to explore the extent to which the experiences and behaviours associated with young successful readers are in place for the six boys.

5.1 Experiences associated with the home

In this section, experiences associated with young successful readers from the home will be considered. The discussion will be structured around the features identified in chapter 1; the home is a rich literate environment, parents read to and with their sons (including stories), parents have positive attitudes to reading and the home is emotionally warm and stable.

When the work of the psycholinguists was examined in chapter 1, Smith's (1985, 1988) 'literacy club' was discussed. It was noted that children understand about how print is used by learning from other people whom they see as being like themselves and by being helped to engage in their activities. I would suggest that, for each of the

six boys, their family takes on the mantle of the literacy club. The data in this section will show the boys being helped and encouraged to engage in reading practices by members of their family who are experienced and motivated readers themselves.

5.1.1 The home is a rich literate environment

In chapter 1, it was noted that homes in which children learn to read successfully are rich language and reading environments in which reading activities occur as part of everyday family life. They contain a wide range of books, other print forms and environmental print. In addition, parents add to these reading materials and set up lifelong practices by taking children to local libraries. These factors will be considered in relation to the six boys who were studied and their families. It will be seen that the boys' homes are rich literate environments in which the boys are talked to, have their own libraries of books, read a wealth of environmental print, are taken to local libraries and in which reading is part of everyday family life. Hence this experience associated with young successful readers is clearly in place for the six boys studied.

5.1.1.1 The home as a language environment

All six boys have parents who have talked to them from the time they were born; the parents remembered talking to the boys continually. This includes talking to them about things they were doing in the home, things they observed in the outside environment, and things they were going to do. The following quotes from the first home visits illustrate these types of talk:

> She (sister) spoke to him all the time … We did all the time as well
>
> (Aidan's mother)

We wouldn't walk to school without noticing the weather and the trees and squirrels

(Barnaby's mother)

I've always talked to him and I've always told him everything we do. And I've always talked to him because I talk a lot myself

(Jacob's mother)

General observation anyway in all things. He's always been interested, pointing things out when we're driving … Generally, when we go around anywhere we try to be observers

(Timo's father)

The parents describe a context in which talk is a central element in their everyday family life. Talk is used for more than finding out practical information and giving commands; it is used in an extended narrative form to talk about shared experiences, including things the family have seen and done, and things they are going to do. The discourse of the home, then, is one which includes an extensive range of talk for a variety of purposes.

Two of the parents also mentioned that they have always spoken to the boys as adults, and not used 'baby talk' with them. Furthermore, they made a conscious effort to discuss the kinds of language they chose to use:

We've always ... talked to him like an adult. We never said bow wow or

pussy cat. It's always been cat, dog, horse, never silly. Because David (father)

and I said 'What's the point? You teach them one lot of words and you've got

to re-teach them all, so we never did that

(Harry's mother)

we always made a point of, we just speak normal to them. Not sort of, this

baby ... not this sort of silly, sweet, sweet talk

(Timo's mother)

These parents deliberately used adult language and vocabulary with the boys, rather

than baby talk which they describe as 'silly'. These parents are creating a learning

environment for their sons in which their sons are treated as equal partners in

discussion. Harry's mother is consciously aware of her role as a teacher since her

comments refer to teaching and re-teaching.

The importance of language as a precursor to literacy was discussed in chapter 1 and

it was recognised that the home can be a richer environment for language

development than the school. The six boys appear to live in homes in which adults

and siblings talk with them, hence their early attempts to make meaning from

language are encouraged and supported.

5.1.1.2 Books in the home

All of the boys' homes contain a wide range of books. The boys had books from birth;

initially fabric books, plastic bath books, and board books which usually had pictures

and single words in them and included alphabet books. The following quotes, from the initial home visits, illustrate that the boys had children's books in their homes from when they were very young:

> He's always had them (books) ... even from like the very first bath books ... then those little like textured books ... wherever we'd go they've got souvenirs, we always used to go for the little books ... just like little board books for their age.
> (Aidan's mother)

> From the top, from the word go, he's always had them (books).
> (Barnaby's father)
> ... there's never a Christmas or birthday that goes by without at least one new book ... They come into books just as naturally ... without any pressure, they are just around
> (Barnaby's mother)

> I bought loads before he was even born ... I've always bought loads of books. I've always encouraged other people to buy him books. ... We've got tons. ... we've got books everywhere
> (Harry's mother)

> he'd got his own books, where it says, like, first words. He'd got a few of them and he'd point to them
> (Jacob's mother)

they've got a lot of books up there ... he's got a whole range of books up there
that he can read himself if he wants to.

(Joe's mother)

I would say he had a book, probably, at six months

(Timo's father)

... they were just sort of around

(Timo's mother)

This data gives a clear picture of boys who have been surrounded by books from an early age. Comments such as 'he's always had them', 'we've got books everywhere' and 'they were just sort of around' indicate that books have always been available for the boys, alongside other toys and games.

Subsequently, the boys had books suited to their age and, when the boys were visited for this study, they all had their own library of books, both fiction and non-fiction, which was kept in their bedrooms or in the living rooms of their homes. The boys all showed me the books they possess and it was clear that they value and read these books; they are familiar with the books they own and they frequently showed me their current favourites. Book ownership is significant since it gives the boys control over the reading experience and allows them to re-read books. Sustained re-reading of favourite books is a pleasurable activity and one which allows appreciation to be deepened; each re-reading allows the potential for something new to be noticed and

understood, particularly as the boys get older and notice things which may have passed them by when they were younger.

5.1.1.3 Environmental print

In addition to books, the boys' homes are rich in environmental print and, from the base of the home, all of the boys are taken out by their parents and read print in the outside environment. The prevalence of environmental reading is particularly evident in the reading diaries kept by the boys' parents towards the end of the first year of data collection and in lists that the boys made of things they read at home.

The following range of environmental print is read in the boys' homes: TV guides; party invitations; e-mails from family members; newspapers (various); letters from clubs/school; cereal boxes; instructions for games; catalogues; greetings cards; letters/postcards; baking instructions; theatre programmes; holiday brochures; leaflets of places to visit; CD covers; video boxes; instructions for making things; food labels at home. The following range of print is recorded as having been read in the outside environment: road/environment signs; shop signs; maps; food labels in shops; menus; print on vehicles; advertisements.

The range of environmental print recorded for the six boys is therefore wide and clearly makes up a significant part of the boys' reading. It seems, then, that the six boys have a very keen interest in the print around them, in their homes and in their wider environments, and that they constantly read the print available to them in their worlds. The following comments illustrate this and are typical of those made by the boys' parents:

Barnaby continues to want to read other things around him. ...

Very keen to read everything and anything else.

He read road signs on the way to and from Cornwall, as well as those in and

around Cornwall as we were out and about.

(Harry)

Joe continues to show great interest in all words around him. ...

He still continues to read words on signs all around him.

Keeps his eyes open and reads whatever he sees! ...

He basically looks around him and reads what he sees.

(Timo)

This data indicates that the boys' parents are aware of their sons' interest in

environmental print and encourage them to read it. The data from the six boys, then,

suggests that their homes are rich in environmental print and that this print form

makes a significant contribution to their reading diets.

5.1.1.4 Sources of reading materials, including libraries

The boys' reading materials come from three main sources; presents from family and

friends, schools, and libraries. All of the boys have books for presents which implies

that books are regarded as something to be desired and valued. Once at school, the

regular sending home of reading books provides additional resources. In addition, the six boys in the study all make use of local libraries:

We do go to the library as well ... In fact we used to go more when Aidan wasn't at school. Amy'd (sister) just started nursery and we were, sort of, had our days free so we would go then

(Aidan's mother)

We used to go quite regularly, Barnaby used to choose and he would help me choose for the girls because they were that much younger then.

(Barnaby's mother)

Took Harry to the library on my day off. He looked at and read a very large book on Egypt. He picked a story book *The Snow Dragon* and a factual book on dinosaurs

(Harry's mother, reading diary)

We did at first start going to the library. My mom used to take him as well.

(Jacob's mother)

He has a dinosaur book which he got from the library. Mum said that Jacob 'nags to go to the library'.

(Fieldnotes)

We had been going every week, and get some books, for four weeks I think it is. I've only just recently taken some back

(Joe's mother)

I tend to go only once every four weeks but then we get ourselves a good

twelve books or some tapes as well.

(Timo's mother)

Timo, who has family in Germany, has also been to the library in Germany when

visiting his family. The boys are keen to obtain additional reading materials and use

libraries to facilitate this. Using a library allows a number of reading skills to be

developed; most significantly, it helps children develop the skill of choosing

appropriate books in terms of readability and interest levels. Since the boys are taken

to the library by their parents, their parents scaffold this skill for them. The data above

also shows Barnaby involved in choosing appropriate books for his younger siblings.

This will develop his skills further since he has to consider the reading level and

interest of other children as well as himself.

In addition to learning to choose books, being taken to the library has the additional

advantages for the boys: it adds to the reading environment of the home by ensuring

that new books are introduced and that books provide for current interests, it shows

that libraries are places to be valued, and it sets up library visiting as a lifelong

practice (discussed in chapter 1).

5.1.1.5 Reading integrated into family life

The list of environmental print that the boys read in their homes suggests that reading

is part of everyday life; for example, reading TV guides, correspondences, catalogues,

games instructions, recipes, video boxes. Reading is clearly not carried out explicitly to teach reading to the boys.

The following data illustrates an example of reading being integrated into a family outing:

> On occasion the whole family reads together. On a recent trip to the Botanical
>
> Gardens, for example, they all spent time sitting reading on the grass.
>
> (Barnaby)

This portrays reading as a relaxed, enjoyable part of family life. Since reading is integrated into family life, rather than being absent altogether or being carried out to teach reading, the boys are likely to regard reading as meaningful and enjoyable.

5.1.2 Parents read to and with their sons

In chapter 1, it was noted that an experience associated with young successful readers is that parents read to and with their children. Through these interactions, parents share in the meaning-making process and scaffold children's attempts at reading. In addition, parents teach children their cultural reading practices and this will contribute to their success if these are similar to school reading practices. It was also noted that listening to stories has a particular contribution to make to children's reading development and broader learning: it helps children understand and use symbolic, abstract language; it helps them understand the story form; and it helps them develop their own 'storying' which helps them make meaning from their world. These areas will be explored in this section. It will be seen that the six boys have stories and other

books read to them, and observations of parent-son reading interactions will show that the boys' parents scaffold their reading and support their attempts at meaning making. It will also be seen that the boys engage in reading practices with their siblings. Hence this experience is clearly in place for the six boys studied.

5.1.2.1 Reading books

Not only do the boys have a rich and plentiful supply of appropriate books, but they have all had these read to them throughout their pre-school years. The following quotes, taken from the initial home visits, highlight that the boys had books and other texts read to them from a very early age, often under twelve months of age:

> we would always have a story every night. Yes, we've always read stories
>
> with him
>
> (Aidan's mother)

> Looking at pictures when he was really small ... because we feel they learn a
>
> lot from looking at books even if they can't read the words
>
> (Harry's mother)

> he's got his own books, where it says, like, first words. He'd got a few of
>
> them and he'd point to them and eventually he used to tell us what those were.
>
> (Jacob's mother)

> we've always read them stories at bedtime ... as soon as they could sit up and

look at a book

(Joe's mother)

It was just a nice thing to do in the evening, part of the going to bed, that's always been part of the routine, maybe sing while he's having his milk and then read a book or something.

(Timo's father)

These early book experiences have given the boys a number of advantages in their reading development; for example, they have had an early introduction to the language of books which is different from the language of speech and to the variety of functions and structures of written language (discussed in chapter 1). This act of reading aloud to the boys has continued beyond the pre-school years. It was clear from the entries in the reading diaries that bedtime story reading is still a regular feature of each boy's life:

Five Minute Bedtime Tales at bedtime

2 bedtime stories

(Aidan)

This was National Bedtime Story Week ... the children were asked to find sponsors for the number of bedtime stories they could read or have read to them. Mum, Dad and Barnaby read several stories each, every night.

Mum and Dad are reading *The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark* at bedtime.

(Barnaby)

Had a couple of bedtime stories.

Read Mr Men books for bedtime.

Also he has had a couple of bedtime stories with his dad.

(Jacob)

Joe has had a story read to him most nights before bed

He is keen to help read when having a bedtime story and we sometimes take it

in turns to read a page.

Joe had a story read to him most nights which he really enjoys.

(Joe)

This data suggests that the parents read stories to the boys which they would not be

able to read on their own, and that sometimes the boys listen while their mother or

father reads to them and sometimes they join in with the reading. The data also

suggests that these book reading experiences are enjoyable. The following quote from

Harry's mother is an illustration of this:

... we had stitches at that ... He started to laugh and then I started laughing and

then we both ended up having the chuckles. We couldn't stop laughing, could

we? (Reading *Mr Cheerful* together.)

(Harry's mother)

It is interesting to note that bedtime reading seems to focus on stories. This gives the

boys the particular advantages associated with listening to this text type: it helps them

understand and use symbolic, abstract language, it helps them understand the story form, and it helps them develop their own 'storying' which helps them make meaning from their world (discussed in chapter 1).

5.1.2.2 Parent-son reading interactions

As part of the data collection, each of the six boys was observed engaged in a reading interaction with a parent. The interaction consisted of the boy reading his school reading book with one of his parents. In all six families, this was a regular activity. Most of the boys had one or two new reading books each week, and all of them read these with a parent. The frequency of this reading event varied from two or three times a week to daily.

Three particular features of the reading interactions stand out: firstly, the parents support the boys' attempts at accurate decoding; secondly, the parents support the boys' attempts at whole text meaning making; and thirdly, the interactions are enjoyable for the participants. Three of the interactions will be described and analysed below. Each of these three features will be illustrated using data from the observations.

Jacob read *A Day in London* by Roderick Hunt (Oxford Reading Tree, Stage 8) with his mother.

Supporting accurate decoding:

If Jacob hesitated at a word, his mother said, 'Have a go' or 'Read it again'.

Jacob stumbled over the word 'ornament'; he knew he had got it wrong and hesitated.

His mother said, 'You got the beginning right, 'or-'.'

His mother helped Jacob with some of the more difficult place names. She used her finger to divide words into sections, e.g. Traf-al-gar, Buck-ing-ham.

Jacob stumbled over a sentence; he knew that it did not make sense and he kept re-reading it until he got it right. His mother was very patient – she let him keep trying without interrupting him.

His mother did tell Jacob some words, e.g. 'scene. (She said afterwards that she told him words that were not easy to sound out or break down.)

Supporting whole text meaning making:

His mother gave him lots of information about London: 'There's lots of famous things in London', 'They're called tubes in London' (Underground railway), ' The bridge has to go up to let the boats through' (Tower Bridge).

Jacob asked lots of questions about underground trains and the waxworks museum; his mother chatted with him.

His mother explained about the waxwork statues, 'They're statues made out of wax of famous people.'

His mother explained things she thought Jacob might not understand, e.g. 'Beheading, that's taking the head off the Queen.'

His mother also highlighted the humour to Jacob, e.g. 'Oh! That's the royal family she's knocking over.'

His mother told Jacob she had been there (Madame Tussuards) which impressed him!

Making the interaction enjoyable:

Jacob went and sat on the settee next to his mother. She pulled him closer.

His mother gave lots of positive feedback to Jacob throughout the session.

At the end, Mum said, 'Very good' to Jacob.

Joe read *Survival Adventure* by Roderick Hunt (Oxford Reading Tree, Stage 9) with his father.

Supporting accurate decoding:

Joe often re-read sentences to make sense of them. His father gave him time to do this.

Joe was struggling to read the word 'careful' and his father said, 'Split it up into two'; Joe read the word correctly.

His father asked Joe to re-read a sentence where he had inserted an additional word.

Joe stumbled over the word 'surrounded'. He re-read it a number of times until he read it correctly.

Joe stumbled over the word 'able'. His father tried to break it down for Joe ('a-ble') then said, 'That's not a very good one to break down. That's a hard one. We'll come back to it.'

Joe hesitated over the word 'laugh; his father laughed and Joe got the word.

When Joe made an error his father encouraged him to re-read the relevant part of the sentence by saying, 'and I never ... what?'

At the end of the story his father went back to words that Joe had found difficult and asked him to read them again, e.g. able, hind. Joe read them correctly.

Supporting meaning making:

Joe was starting from where he had got to at school so his father asked him to tell him what had happened so far. Joe re-told the story so far. He also asked Joe about the setting; 'Where's the adventure?'

His father made comments about the story, e.g. 'She's lucky she didn't cut her foot off in there' (a trap) and 'He looks a bit cross, doesn't he?'

After reading 'hind legs', his father asked Joe, 'What does that mean?' Joe pointed out that 'hind' was like 'behind'. After reading about a 'trapper', his father asked, 'What's a trapper?' and Joe answered 'Someone who puts out traps.'

Joe read a piece of speech and his father said, 'How would he have said it?' His father then modelled reading speech with appropriate intonation.

Joe also liked to point things out to his father. He said, 'Dad, look, she's trying to break that trap.'

His father asked Joe why a character could not run. He replied, 'She's got a broken leg.' His father added, 'A sore leg from the trap.'

His father said, 'She's not very brave really, is she?' alerting Joe to inference in the text.

The story had an episode about catching fish and his father explained to Joe about fish-tickling. His father prompted a discussion about why making fire and catching fish were necessary. He explained that it was a long time ago and they were up in the mountains. Joe said that there would be no Sainsbury's or fish and chip shop there!

Joe and his father discussed the expressions on the characters' faces.

The story had an episode where sticks were rubbed together to make fire. Joe asked his father, 'Is that how you make fire?' His father explained how they used to make fire. Joe asked, 'Could we do that?' and his father said that they could have a go in the garden at the weekend.

The text discussed the food they were eating. His father asked Joe, 'Would you rather eat fish, berries or chocolate?' Joe laughed and said, 'chocolate.'

Making the interaction enjoyable:

Joe and his father were sitting cuddled up together on a settee in the playroom.

His father made positive, encouraging noises; 'yup.'

Joe read the word correctly and his father said, 'Good lad.'

Finally, his father said, 'Good. Well done. That was good, Joe.'

In addition to the above, Joe's father supported Joe when he became tired towards the end of the session; he suggested that for the rest of the story they would read alternate pages and they completed the book in this way.

Timo read *Pol and Pax on the Third Moon* (New Way, yellow level) with his mother.

Supporting accurate decoding:

Timo read the word 'dragged' incorrectly and his mother said, 'Follow the letters.'

His mother often asked Timo to look at words again. She was keen to ensure accurate reading.

His mother told Timo to slow down and read each word.

Supporting meaning making:

His mother helped Timo find the place he had got to in the book. She told him to be prepared for unusual words. (The space people in the story add a rhyming word to the end of their sentences when they speak, e.g. 'What have you got there-where?', 'Give us the bread-head.')

His mother quite often modelled reading this for Timo (space people's rhyming speech) because it was quite difficult to read with appropriate intonation and meaning.

Timo read the word 'grew' and his mother said, 'Look at 'grew', that's in your words for this week.' (Making lexical link with writing; spellings.)

His mother pointed out ellipsis to Timo, pointing to it and saying, 'Dot, dot, dot.'

Timo often asked questions about the text and his mother explained things to him where necessary.

Timo said to his mother, 'Look, Mum, this doesn't make sense' and they discussed how you need to read it for it to make sense. His mother modelled this for Timo. They discussed inventing machines. There was one of these in the book and his mother said to Timo, 'That's an interest of yours.' Timo explained the machine to his mother and she said, 'You could have invented that, couldn't you?'

Making the interaction enjoyable:

Timo and his mother were sitting together on the settee. They had gone into the living room and left his father looking after the two younger children in another room.

Timo laughed at one of the rhyming words and his mother laughed with him.

At the sentence, 'They were as clever as they could be, which still wasn't very clever' Timo and his mother laughed together.

His mother said, 'Very good' when Timo read difficult parts of the text.

Firstly, then, the parents support the boys' attempts at accurate decoding. They allow the boys time to work things out for themselves, encourage them to re-read parts of sentences, break words down into parts, encourage them to look at letters, tell them words and give them non-verbal cues. It would be interesting to explore how parents obtained this knowledge about the teaching of reading. Perhaps the parents have good knowledge about reading because they are readers, or perhaps they have had instruction from schools. However, from wherever this knowledge has come, the boys are effectively supported in their attempts at decoding unknown words.

Secondly, the parents support the boys' attempts at whole text meaning making. They spend time explaining and talking about things that come up in the text, relate parts of the stories to the boys' lives and alert the boys to inference in the text. Jacob and his

mother talk about London, Joe and his father talk about surviving a long time ago in the mountains, and Timo and his mother talk about the space people's rhyming speech. Whilst the parents are concerned with accurate reading, they also have a regard for the story as a whole. A high quality fiction reading experience should be concerned with the whole text, and, by paying attention to this, the parents are ensuring that reading is regarded as a whole text meaning making activity as well as a decoding one.

Thirdly, the parents make the interactions enjoyable. They sit close to their sons, provide positive feedback and frequently laugh together. The parents and boys are relaxed and the boys are not pressurised by being expected to read the book word perfectly or read without support. Perhaps the parents want to make the reading experience an enjoyable one for their sons because they find reading enjoyable and they want this to be their son's experience.

Overall, then, the boys' parents are effectively scaffolding their son's reading development: the boys get feedback on their hypothesis-testing, meaning making is a shared endeavour which draws on personal experiences and parents provide feedback and encouragement (discussed in chapter 1). Further, since these interactions are individual, they can be shaped to each boy's experiences and particular reading needs. The data from these observations, then, provides a picture of high quality reading interactions at home and supports Hannon's (1995) belief that parents are 'up to the job' of hearing children read.

Heath's study (1983) notes that children learn literacy from within a cultural context, hence they do not all learn the same literacy, and this has an impact on subsequent school learning. In her study, the literacy practices of one particular cultural group (the 'townspeople') were closest to school literacy practices and those children achieved most highly in school (discussed in chapter 1). In this study, regarding the reading of books to the boys and parent-son reading interactions, the reading practices in the boys' homes are close to school reading practices. Hence the messages that the six boys receive about reading at home and at school are compatible, and it is likely that this has also contributed to their success. (Comparisons between home and school reading are discussed in greater detail in section 5.3.3.2 below and in the conclusion.)

5.1.2.3 The boys read with siblings

In addition to reading with their parents, a considerable amount of data was collected on the involvement of siblings in the boys' reading. The following data, including quotes from parents and fieldnotes, illustrates how each boy was involved in reading with his siblings:

> Amy (sister) used to come home with a book and we always sat down ... It was an enjoyment thing for all of us ... when he bought a book home from school he'd say, 'Oh look, like Amy used to have' and he was really chuffed ... and they'd have a real chat about it.
>
> (Aidan's mother)
>
> Aidan reads with his older sister. He used to listen to her read her school reading books. Now they play schools!
>
> (Fieldnotes)

we wake up in the morning and he's either reading them a book or Milly's reading the book, but they're all sat round. ... They take it in turns to be teacher.

(Barnaby's father)

On my visit, Barnaby's sister, Milly, read to me. She started school in September and bought home her first reading book this week. Mum said that when she first bought it home they all sat around and read it with her. Barnaby likes helping Milly with her reading.

(Fieldnotes)

Barnaby reads to his two younger sisters and they read to him. Mum believes that they all learn from each other.

(Fieldnotes)

He read a little book to his sister.

Harry has read several different books of his own to Jessica this week.

He also read his (library) story book to Jessica several times.

Also Jessica had 2 (library) books, which Harry has read to her.

(Harry's mother)

Harry's sister was keen to be involved. She bought us a book to read to her and she looked through the books once Harry had finished with them.

(Fieldnotes)

Jacob has also read to his little brother – Digimon Annual!

Read a couple of books to his brother (baby books).

This week I have noticed he is reading his own books to himself and baby ones for his brother.

(Jacob's mother)

Jacob spends time reading to himself, for example when he wakes up in the morning, and reading to his baby brother.

(Fieldnotes)

upstairs in their room, they've got loads of books up there, and when they go to bed they don't always go straight to sleep ... you generally find when you go up to check them that there's books strewn all over the floor and they've been looking (at them) so it's usually at night-time that they do that.

(Joe's mother)

Joe's brother and sister were very much involved in what we were doing. Sam sat reading many of the books we were looking at. He told me his favourites and went and got books to show me, e.g. the Roald Dahl anthology. Kate went upstairs and bought down a pile of her books to read. She also read me her school book – she started school this term and had a reading book at home.

(Fieldnotes)

I've heard him read to Jake: Kipper books and Percy the Park-keeper.

(Timo's mother)

Mum has just had another baby – about two weeks ago. She said Timo and Jake are already reading to Charlie!

(Fieldnotes)

In these reading families, then, all of the boys read with their siblings, whether the siblings are older or younger than themselves. Siblings frequently read together, particularly before going to sleep in the evening or when they wake up in the morning. A number of the parents commented that they believe the siblings learn about reading from each other. It is likely, then, that reading with siblings, whether older or younger, gives the boys valuable extra practice at reading. The data from this study indicates that the boys engage in the following reading activities with their siblings: listening to stories read by siblings; reading aloud to siblings; talking about texts with siblings; helping younger siblings with reading; reading activities within a 'schools' game. These activities allow the boys to learn from more experienced readers and to be in the role of expert themselves.

In chapter 2, it was noted that studies of family involvement in children's literacy development tend to emphasise the role of parents. This section, then, has provided data on sibling involvement in reading development and has outlined a range of reading activities in which siblings engage.

5.1.3 Parents have positive attitudes to reading

In chapter 1, it was noted that an experience associated with young successful readers is that parents have positive attitudes to reading. It seems that when parents enjoy reading, own books and read to find things out, this behaviour is demonstrated to children. Because children want to be like grown-ups, they are likely to imitate this modelled behaviour, and this helps them become successful readers. In this section, it will be seen that the boys' parents enjoy reading themselves and also that they are keen to support the boys' school reading. Thus the boys learn that reading is enjoyable

and that school reading is important. Hence this experience is in place for the six boys in this study.

5.1.3.1 Parental love of reading

All of the boys have parents who enjoy reading. The following quotes from the boys' parents illustrate that they are readers and that the boys regularly see them reading:

Steve (father) reads quite a lot, so he would see him reading. The newspaper, you know, at the weekends … and books and things.

(Aidan's mother)

I think we enjoy the books as much as they do.

we enjoy books so it (having books around) was a natural extension of that really. … I think it's from having a love of books ourselves.

You're dealing with a child here that's had it from the word go, in a family environment, where we enjoy it.

(Barnaby's mother and father)

I love reading, and always did, loved English literature at school. David loves reading factual books, but we both love reading …

He knows I like reading … he's always grown up with us reading.

(Harry's mother)

we get a paper every day so they see us reading the paper. I'm always reading a book. I read a book at bedtime every night. Once I get back to nursing I get

the Nursing Times every week as well.

He (father) reads the paper as well ... most of his reading is work-based ... he gets a couple of journals delivered on a weekly basis that he'll sit and read. They see that.

(Joe's mother)

It should be noted that not all of the boys see their parents reading. Jacob's parents and Aidan's mother say that, whilst they enjoy reading, they have little time to do it, and their children do not therefore see them reading regularly. Perhaps, then, parental attitude to reading is more significant than modelling. All of the parents enjoy reading, even in cases where they feel they have little time to read.

The notion of being part of a family of readers is a powerful one. If a child is born into a family where parents and other family members read, they will experience reading as an activity which is an integral and valued part of family life. In such families, then, reading is part of the family identity; it is a regular family activity and one in which the child will be encouraged to participate. Children in such a context are perhaps more likely to achieve success at reading, since they are likely to have more practice at it and to regard it as a valued activity.

5.1.3.2 Supporting school reading

All of the boys' parents are keen to support their sons' school reading. They all monitor the reading books which come home, and express annoyance when this does not happen or when they feel books are not changed frequently enough, for example:

Jacob did not have a reading book from school at all this week – not very happy about that!

(Jacob's mother, reading diary)

For our liking, he doesn't change his book often enough.

(When Timo moved from bringing home two books a week to one a week.)

(Timo's mother)

The parents, then, all monitor the books that their sons bring home from school and, as noted earlier, they all read these books with them. This concern for school reading gives the boys the message that school reading is important, thus positive values about reading in school are being shared.

It is interesting to note, however, that the parents do not want to put a lot of pressure on the boys:

I wouldn't say we, like, tried to drum in the reading ... at an early age ... we just thought it would come.

(Aidan's mother)

that was one thing we consciously didn't do (teach him to read at home) because we wanted him to enjoy it with his teacher really and not be streets ahead ... so we didn't really push him.

(Barnaby's father)

we just wanted to encourage them and help him as much as we can ... because

we know that schools ... have got lots of children in the classes

(Harry's mother)

now that they (books) are a bit longer he maybe reads half a book one night

and half the book the next night.

(Joe's mother)

the expectation is ... to do ten minutes a night and I must admit we don't. ...

I'm not pushing him (when) he is tired.

(Timo's mother)

Harry's mother even expressed the opinion that the school pushes him too hard:

I think they put a lot of pressure on the children. I mean he's come home for

the holiday and he's got three books.

The boys have not therefore become successful readers by being pushed hard at home.

When reading interactions were discussed above, it was noted that these interactions

are enjoyable and not pressurised.

An interesting literacy event, to which a number of the parents made reference in the

research data, is the boys or their siblings bringing home their first school reading

book; this seems to be a 'rite of passage' in these families. It is an important event

which is marked and celebrated. This celebration is significant since it conveys the

message that reading is valued and that school reading is considered important by the family. And this message may motivate the children to try particularly hard to achieve success at reading.

5.1.4 The home is emotionally warm and stable

The final experience associated with successful reading is that the home is emotionally warm and stable. It is very difficult for me to assess this warmth and stability in each home since this is not something I could ask about or observe explicitly. However, some of the data does suggest that the homes may have these attributes.

Firstly, the boys' family backgrounds appear stable in that all of the boys live with both of their birth parents who are married, and all of the siblings have the same parents. In addition, there was no geographical movement over the two years I studied the boys. One family moved house locally but this did not necessitate a change of school for the children. Secondly, it was noted above that the boys are not pressurised in their reading. The reading interactions observed and the parents' attitudes to the boys' reading are relaxed and, therefore, could be described as warm. Finally, I was always made welcome in the family homes and I felt very comfortable during my visits; I was always offered food and drink, family members spoke to each other and to me in a relaxed manner and I was always included in the family activities that were taking place during my visits.

My impression of the six homes is therefore that they are warm and stable. However, it must be recognised that this is a subjective view and that the data cannot show

conclusively that the six homes are emotionally warm and stable. It cannot be known, for example, whether the family behaviour during my visits was the same as that when I was not present.

5.2 Behaviours associated with the boys

In this section, behaviours associated with successful reading from within the boys themselves will be considered. The discussion will be structured around the behaviours identified in chapter 1; in order for children to be young successful readers they have to be self-motivated and phonologically sensitive. It will be seen that the boys are self-motivated readers who voluntarily engage in reading and reading-related activities in their leisure time. Whilst it is difficult to assess whether or not the boys had early phonological sensitivity, it will be seen that all of the boys enjoy rhyme and poetry.

5.2.1 The boys are self-motivated

The boys are all self-motivated readers. This will be illustrated by examining the reading and reading-related activities in which they engage voluntarily, particularly in their leisure time, rather than the reading which they are required to do by others. It will be seen that the boys spend time reading and re-reading their own collections of books (fiction and non-fiction), watch narrative films, engage in reading-related games and activities and regard reading as a hobby.

Wells (1986) notes that a measure of children's interest in reading is how many books they own and how long they choose to spend reading (discussed in chapter 1). Whilst this information is not quantified in the research data, it was noted above that the boys

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have their own libraries of books, and the boys and their parents report that the boys spent long periods of time reading and re-reading fiction and non-fiction books from these collections. This practice allows the boys to choose their own texts for reading from a familiar range, silently read extended texts for pleasure, and re-read familiar texts.

Many of the books in the boys' book collections are picture books. Reading and re-reading these allows the boys to develop their reading experience, since it was noted that authors of high quality picture books help children with their reading development in a number of ways. Through this reading and re-reading, the boys are collaborating with the author in the storytelling process; learning about the different ways that text can appear on a page, and how text and illustration combine to make meaning, discovering the rich possibilities of language; experiencing intertextuality; learning about value systems, in the real world and in texts, and of the way narratives represent these through story conventions and through metaphor, both in text and illustration (discussed in chapter 1, also Watson and Styles 1996). In the next chapter, where the boys' fiction reading will be discussed, it will be seen that the boys' prolific reading of their own fiction texts has given them a wide knowledge of children's literature and the ability to understand how some stories relate to other stories, and how books draw on other texts.

When the boys showed me their collections of picture books, their enjoyment of these texts was apparent. The following conversation between Harry and myself illustrates this:

H   See this then.

SS   That's Mr Cheerful.

H   It's funny. This is really good.

SS   Right.

H   But look. This is very funny.

SS   Go on then. Read me the funny bits.

H   (I'll read) all of this part coz it's really funny. When you see the page …

SS   Will it make me laugh?

H   Yeah.

(Harry read Mr Cheerful to me.)

(H Harry, SS myself)

Harry was eager to read Mr Cheerful to me and to share his pleasure in the humour with me. Harry's expectation that reading picture books will be an enjoyable experience make him a self-motivated reader; he reads voluntarily during his leisure time because he associates reading with pleasure.

The boys also have non-fiction books in their book collections and they spend time reading and re-reading these. Again, their non-fiction reading will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, and it will be seen that the boys' prolific reading of their own non-fiction books has given them advanced levels of general knowledge.

The boys also feed their love of narrative by watching films. All of the boys enjoy watching films in their leisure time, at the cinema, on DVD or on video. Those mentioned by the boys include: *Toy Story 1 and 2*; *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*; *Cats and Dogs*; *BFG*; *Shrek*; *Monsters Inc.*; *Ice Age*; *Dinosaur*; and *James and the Giant Peach*. Many of these are adaptations of novels with which

the boys are familiar, including books by Roald Dahl (*BFG* and *James and the Giant Peach*). The boys' love of narrative, then, extends beyond written texts to visual texts. In their leisure time, they enjoy 'reading' visual texts as well as written texts.

A significant number of reading-related games and activities are mentioned in the reading diaries kept by the boys' parents and in lists that the boys made of things they read at home. These include word searches, crosswords, word puzzles in magazines, hangman, *Scrabble*, *Top Trumps*, and *Pokemon* cards. My conversations with Aidan about *Pokemon* show his enthusiasm and expertise with this reading-related game:

A   Do you recognise this one?

SS   Pokemon. Oh Pokemon, is that Pikachu?

A   Yeah, well done. Do you recognise?

SS   I only know Pokemon and Pikachu. Uh, a fish, who is it?

A   Medapod.

SS   Who?

A   Medapod.

SS   Medapod.

A   And Digler, Voltor, Ditto, Arbish, Jigglerpuk.

…

A   Pokemon stands for pocket monsters.

SS   That's right.

A   And Digimon stands for digital monsters.

SS   Digital monster. I could have guessed that.

(A Aidan, SS myself.)

The boys therefore enjoy word games and games which involve reading. Timo also makes his own word searches to send to family members who live in Germany. Playing word games and games which involve reading reinforces the notion that reading is enjoyable for these boys. They get pleasure from reading-related games and activities and spend part of their leisure time engaged in them.

Another good indication that the boys are self-motivated readers is that many of them regard reading as one of their hobbies. Many of them explicitly expressed this to me in my initial visits to them. I had an interesting dialogue about this with Timo over the two year period. He established early on that reading was one of his hobbies:

It's one of my favourite things.

Then during the second year of data collection, Timo informed me that his hobbies were now football and making things, especially out of lego. He said reading was no longer one of his hobbies. On my next visit to him, however, this was revoked and he told me that reading was still one of his hobbies again along with sport and art. This dialogue illustrates that Timo is very conscious of the things he enjoys doing in his leisure time, and that reading is one of these things, although for a brief period it was superseded by 'football' and 'making things'.

As well as stating that reading is one of their hobbies, the boys engage in hobby-like practices in their fiction reading; for example, many of them enjoy collecting series of books, they are pleased to receive books as presents, and they buy books with their own money:

Aidan went through reading all of the Roald Dahl books – he has 13 Roald Dahl books. Aidan asked for Roald Dahl's *Going Solo* for a Christmas present.

Barnaby has just had his birthday. He received some super books which he showed me and was clearly very pleased with.

I've only got two more books to collect and then I've got the whole set.
(Felix the rabbit books)
I bought *The Bumpy Ride* with my own money. ... I've got three Percy books.
(Percy the Park Keeper books)
(Timo)

The boys clearly value their book collections. The six boys, then, spend part of their leisure time engaged in reading and reading-related games and activities. This element of their reading is entirely self-motivated, thus this behaviour is in place for these boys.

5.2.2 The boys are phonologically sensitive

It was stated in chapter 1 that this study will only make limited reference to phonological sensitivity since the study focus is on social rather than psychological aspects of reading. I did not therefore carry out any psychological tests on the boys in order to assess phonological sensitivity. It can, however, be noted in the research data that five of the boys particularly enjoy rhyme and poetry.

Five of the boys enjoy reading poetry; only one (Harry) said that he would not usually choose to read poetry. When shown *Poetry Paintbox* by John Foster, five of the boys said that they would like to read the book because they like poetry. The boys all started to read some of the poems out loud, without having been asked to, and they all read with good regard for the rhythm of poetry. Poetry is evident in the reading logs of four of the boys and a number of the boys own their own poetry books. Aidan enjoys writing poems and makes up little rhyming verses to go in birthday cards. In rhyme and poetry, language is used in more unusual and varied ways than in narrative writing, and often includes the use of imagery and figurative language; the boys appear to enjoy this language variety.

The boys, then, can hear and read the rhythm of poetry and enjoy the language used in poems. This may suggest that the boys had early phonological sensitivity; however, it cannot be stated with any confidence that this behaviour is present in the six boys.

5.3 Experiences associated with the school

In this section, experiences associated with successful reading at school will be considered. The discussion will be structured around the experiences identified in chapter 1; provision of high quality reading resources, structured teaching and effective learning time. It will be seen that the schools exhibit strengths and limitations in each of these experiences.

5.3.1 Provision of high quality reading resources

The first experience associated with successful reading at school is that high quality reading resources are provided so that children are motivated to read for pleasure and

to find out information. In addition, high quality reading resources should be used in their entirety and promote reading for pleasure, rather than being only for pedagogical purposes. Further, reading materials from the outside world should be used in the classroom.

All four of the schools offer a range of resources for reading. Each class has a book area and all the schools have school libraries. In some cases, use is also made of the local community library. All of the boys read fiction, poetry and non-fiction texts in line with statutory requirements (DfES 2000). For guided or individual reading, all of the schools use reading scheme books (books that have been written to teach children to read). At three of the schools, Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) is used as the core scheme, and at the fourth school, New Way and Ginn 360 schemes are the core schemes. However, in all schools, the teachers were eager to explain that this reading is supplemented with additional texts. In some cases this is with additional scheme books and in other cases this is with class or school library books.

In the reading lessons I observed, texts used for shared and guided reading include a balance of scheme and non-scheme books. Non-scheme books include fiction, poetry and non-fiction books such as *The Train Ride* by June Crebbin, *The Bad-Tempered Ladybird* by Eric Carle, *This is the Bear and the Scary Night* by Sarah Hayes, *The Owl and the Pussycat* by Edward Lear and *Minibeast Encyclopaedia* by Monica Hughes. The reading of ICT texts was never observed in the classroom. This is not, of course, to say that the boys were never engaged in reading on-screen texts; however, ICT texts were not used in any observed lesson which suggests that such reading is

not a frequent part of the formal reading curriculum. In addition, reading materials from the outside world were never observed in the classroom.

It has been noted that whole texts should be read for pleasure rather than purely used for pedagogical purposes. A small number of the boys' teachers do try to read extended texts aloud to the children on a regular basis:

> I do read to them every week at least once. I've been reading Roald Dahl.
> Aidan's Year 1 teacher

> The teacher said that she reads aloud to the class once a week and that they also do story-telling as a class, where they take turns to contribute to a story.
> Aidan's Year 2 teacher

> I try to take five or ten minutes at the end of the day … we've actually started this term reading *The Owl Who's Afraid of the Dark* … They've not had a chaptered book (before)
> Barnaby's Year 1 teacher

However, this is not always the case. Some teachers regarded reading aloud as a treat which they are not often able to carry out:

> We've been reading The Worst Witch now since September
> Harry's Year 1 teacher (speaking on 30th November)

they think it's a real treat but we don't do it very often

Timo's Year 1 teacher

This indicates that reading texts aloud to children is something which the teachers know is valuable; however, they tend to fit it in to gaps in the school day, rather than give it a regular timetabled slot. Only one school had a regular slot for reading aloud and this was only once a week.

Regarding children's own sustained reading of self-chosen texts, all of the teachers say that they encourage the children to read their own choice of text to themselves and with their friends. Barnaby and Joe's teachers encourage 'regular' silent reading; Harry and Timo's teachers encourage children to read a book from class library when they have finished their work; Aidan's teacher encourages this type of reading every two or three weeks; Jacob's teacher encourages it after snack time every day. Children's own sustained reading is therefore evident in all four schools; however, again it appears that it is fitted in to transition periods (when children have completed their work, snack time) and gaps in the school day, rather than having a regular timetabled slot to ensure that all children regularly engage in this activity.

This data, then, supports the concerns of Minns (1999) and Pullman (2003) noted in chapter 1. Whilst high quality resources are evident in the boys' classrooms, they are very much used for pedagogical purposes and sustained reading for pleasure has a lower priority. Teaching reading through the Literacy Hour is the priority and dominates reading in the timetable; sustained reading of texts for pleasure is fitted in to transition periods and gaps in the school day, hence it occurs only intermittently.

To summarise, the schools exhibit strengths and limitations regarding this experience associated with successful reading. A strength is that a range of fiction, poetry and non-fiction texts is used in the boys' classrooms during their reading lessons. Limitations are that ICT texts and reading materials from the outside world are under-used, and that sustained reading of texts for pleasure is not prioritised.

5.3.2 Structured teaching

The second experience associated with successful reading at school is that children experience structured teaching. This includes having clear learning objectives which start from the knowledge, skills and understandings of reading that the children already have. All of the teachers had structured reading programmes for the class based on the NLS learning objectives and teaching units.

Learning objectives for lessons are provided for the whole class (during shared reading) and for ability groups of children (during guided/independent reading). In no cases are there individual learning objectives for the boys. This data supports Stainthorp and Hughes' (1999) findings; in their study, only one of the early readers had individual learning objectives. In this study, in some cases, class and group learning objectives are challenging for the boys; for example, the following:

Know that encyclopaedias are arranged in alphabetical order

Aidan, Year 1

Learn how to do a review of a poem, with particular reference to rhyme, rhythm and punctuation

Aidan, Year 2

Use a glossary to find out word meanings

Discuss layout, rhyme and meaning in classic children's poetry

Harry and Timo, Year 2

Understand the use of the apostrophe

Recognise the 'traditional tale' fiction genre

Joe, Year 2

However, in many cases, learning objectives are not challenging for the boys. Despite this, the boys are frequently challenged during reading lessons; in many of the observed lessons, this was incidental rather than being part of the planned lesson. (In the next chapter it will be seen that the boys are good at teaching themselves lessons about reading and because of this they are often challenged in lessons in ways which are unplanned.)

The data again suggests that the schools exhibit strengths and limitations regarding this experience associated with successful reading. Structured class and group reading programmes sometimes challenge the boys; however, the boys do not have individual reading programmes starting from the knowledge, skills and understandings of reading that they already have.

5.3.3 Effective learning time

The third experience associated with successful reading at school is that effective learning time is provided. This will be analysed by examining the whole class (shared reading), group (guided reading) and individual teaching in the boys' classrooms. Through whole class, group and individual teaching methods, effective reading practices can be modelled and children's own attempts at reading can be scaffolded.

5.3.3.1 Shared reading

During this part of the Literacy Hour lesson, the boys are taught in a class group. In the first part of the lesson, a shared text is read and the teacher models effective reading practices to the children. This is pitched at a level which is above average for the class group; hence it is below the level of the most able children. In this context, one way in which differentiation can be achieved is by targeted questioning. During the research conversations, the teachers showed an awareness of this strategy:

On the carpet it's harder because you teach to the average, don't you really? And then it's trying to pitch the questions to all. I'll say 'Right, this is for reds' or 'This is for you Aidan'. That kind of thing, so it's quite easy in that respect.

Aidan's Year 1 teacher

Within the discussion about the text, we prepare questions that are aimed at different abilities.

Barnaby's Year 1 teacher

the way they tackle it (shared text), that's extended through questioning

Harry's Year 2 teacher

> I do tend to ask direct questions ... perhaps ask him a question about where it leads to try and make him think more about what's happening in the story.

Jacob's Year 1 teacher

Observations, however, indicate that this strategy is not always fully utilised. In Year 1, only two out of the six teachers utilised targeting questions as a strategy for differentiation; Aidan was chosen to answer the more difficult questions and Jacob's teacher directed a challenging question to Jacob which he answered correctly.

The other four teachers did not utilise this strategy:

> One question was targeted at Barnaby and he answered, although this was not a challenging question – many children had been asked the same question.

> Questions were not particularly directed at Harry although he was chosen to answer two questions directed at the whole class.

> Questions were not targeted at him, but he did answer questions directed at the whole class. ... There was little evidence of more challenging questions being targeted at the more able children.

(Joe)

> Questions were not particularly targeted at Timo, although he did answer

many questions directed to the whole class/group.

In Year 2, observations indicate that this strategy is utilised more frequently; four of the teachers used targeted questioning and, in addition, follow-up questions were used to extend children's thinking:

Aidan had questions targeted to him during the shared part of the lesson.

He put his hand up and was chosen to answer three questions. On one occasion the teacher asked him a follow-up question to one of his responses. The teacher did ask some challenging questions that Harry did not respond to, indicating that there was a level of challenge for Harry in this part of the lesson.

Jacob responded effectively to a question which asked him to predict the genre/purpose of the book from the cover. He effectively answered a challenging question about inter-textual links. In addition the teacher asked Jacob a follow-up question to one of his responses.

The teacher's questions were targeted, e.g. the less able children were asked about the author/illustrator, the more able about the publisher/barcode.

The teacher catered for Timo effectively during the shared part of the session; she listened to his comments and returned them to him (the poem being like a song) and she referred to work he had been doing (indents).

The data, then, indicates an inconsistent picture. In the most effective lessons, the boys' learning is developed by having questions targeted to them and by follow-up questions which extend their thinking. In the least effective lessons, the boys answer questions which have been directed to the whole class and do not develop their learning.

The above observations all refer to the shared text part of the lesson. The shared part of the lesson which includes word and sentence level work shows very little differentiation, hence there is very little opportunity for the boys' learning to be developed. In fact, only one lesson was observed in which learning was developed in this part of the literacy hour; a lesson in which Joe learned about the apostrophe. In many cases the teachers commented that work during this part of the lesson would have been easy for the boys; despite this, the boys are not provided with alternative differentiated work.

5.3.3.2 Guided reading

During guided reading sessions, the children work in ability groups and the teacher scaffolds the children's own attempts at reading. All of the boys work in the top ability groups. In all cases, the teachers plan learning objectives for the group of children and feel that the boys fit in with the group:

> So they actually go quite well together and that little group, the red group at the top, they are actually quite a good group actually. They go quite well together.
>
> Aidan's Year 1 teacher

He's one of a higher ability group within the classroom and, as such, the work we plan every week, he falls within that group and the work's differentiated to meet his needs really. But I wouldn't say special provision was needed because he fits nicely within that group.

Barnaby's Year 1 teacher

Harry tends to fit in with what we're doing really. I think they are pretty much level in my top group.

Harry's Year 1 teacher

('Do you have to make any special provision for him?')

Within that group there are some very good readers. So no, not really. I feel the books we are actually reading with them stretches them.

Jacob's Year 1 teacher

He works in the top group in his literacy. So no individual provision is made. Six, seven, eight children read in the class who are at a similar rate.

Joe's Year 1 teacher

In my top group … they're all much the same, all on the same sort of level.

Timo's Year 1 teacher

The teachers believe that the boys' learning is developed in these differentiated groups. Specific challenges were mentioned; for example, sending the group to the

library to find something out, and focusing on comprehension rather than decoding words:

I try to give them an extension activity where the others wouldn't have that. They have group based targets. With that group I'll set them a task and say I want you to find something out for me and I'll send them off down the corridor to the library to fetch things and come back. I'll set them a problem to try and solve and things like that.

Aidan's Year 1 teacher

They can pretty much read anything, but then what we'll do in that guided session is give them a focus. For Harry, it's often not necessarily about strategies to tackle new words, it's strategies to comprehend.

Harry's Year 1 teacher

In many cases this worked successfully; in a number of observations, the boys' learning was developed. However, this was not always observed to be the case; on some occasions, there was potential for the boys' learning to have been developed further. In these cases, this seemed to be due to the group nature of the task and to the practical problem of interruptions from other children. Difficulties with the group nature of the task are illustrated in the following data:

He had a lot to say about each poem and, realistically, there would not have been time to pursue everything he said.

Inevitably, some of Harry's individual interests and comments about the

poems were not able to be pursued.

(Year 2)

Timo started to read the poem aloud but was stopped by the teacher (he was

supposed to be following it while another child read it).

Timo did make a number of relevant comments that were not picked up on by

the teacher.

Timo would have benefited from having specific questions targeted to him,

and from being asked for more extended responses on occasion. Timo had lots

of comments which were not able to be pursued.

(Year 2)

The group nature of the task did not allow for individual interests and comments to be

pursued or for individualised learning. Interruptions from other children were a

problem during guided reading; because the teacher works with one group, the other

groups have to work independently. Observation notes included the following data:

While the adult-child ratio was favourable, there were lots of interruptions

from other children during the session.

(Aidan, Year 2)

In fact, one school has recently abandoned guided reading due to this difficulty.

During the second year of study, Barnaby and Joe's school changed practice from

guided reading to paired reading since the teachers felt that this was more beneficial

to all of the children. They had found guided reading difficult to manage and felt that

the children did not benefit from it without additional adult support in the classroom. During paired reading, the children are paired with children from the Reception class. The teachers find these sessions more valuable and the children enjoy them; during the sessions, the older children read with expression, talk about the pictures and answer the younger children's questions.

The difficulties in these school reading interactions, that the boys' individual interests and comments are not pursued and that there is little scope for individualised learning and interruptions from other children, contrast with the home reading interactions which were discussed above (section 5.1.2.2). One of the strengths of the home interactions is that they are shaped to each boy's experience and particular reading needs; meaning making is a shared endeavour which draws on personal experiences and the boys get feedback on their hypothesis-testing. The school interactions cannot be shaped to the boys' experiences and particular reading needs in the same way, partly because adults in school have not shared the boys' lives and experiences and partly because guided reading is conducted in groups. In addition, home interactions have fewer interruptions since parents have a smaller number of children at home.

5.3.3.3 Individual reading

Although individual reading is less common than previously (guided reading replaced individual reading in the NLS as noted in section 1.4.3), individual reading is still occurring in the four schools. In Aidan's school, the teacher hears the children read individually around once a week; in Barnaby and Joe's school, individual readers are heard 'frequently' and there is a scheme where the lunchtime supervisors come in twenty minutes before the lunch period to hear individual children read; in Harry and

Timo's school, children are heard reading individually during lunch hours and this occurs for each child around once every fortnight; in Jacob's school, children are heard individually 'if there's a particular difficulty.' Jacob's teacher did add that when Jacob moves from Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) books to his own choice of books he will hear him read individually 'just to make sure he's not choosing material that either he doesn't understand or that he can't actually read.'

The frequency of individual reading interactions, then, varies between the four schools in the study; it occurs 'frequently', weekly, fortnightly or when a difficulty is identified. It should be noted that these interactions are largely for assessment and monitoring purposes, rather than for teaching purposes; teachers do not have learning objectives for these individual reading interactions.

5.4 Chapter conclusion

The results presented in this chapter have shown that the experiences associated with young successful readers are present for the six boys in their homes. The boys live in 'reading families' in which a variety of practices support their reading development. Their homes are rich literate environments in which the boys are talked to, have their own libraries of books, read a wealth of environmental print and are taken to local libraries. Reading, therefore, is part of everyday family life. The boys have stories and other books read to them, and observations of parent-son reading interactions show that the boys' parents scaffold their reading and support their attempts at meaning making. In addition, the boys engage in a variety of reading practices with their siblings. The boys' parents enjoy reading themselves and are keen to support the boys' school reading, thus the boys understand that reading is enjoyable and school

reading is important. Finally, the boys' homes appear to be emotionally warm and secure.

The six boys exhibit one of the behaviours associated with young successful readers from within themselves; they are self-motivated readers. The boys choose to spend time reading and re-reading their own collections of books (fiction and non-fiction), watch narrative films, engage in reading-related games and activities, and regard reading as a hobby. Whilst it was difficult to assess whether or not the boys had early phonological sensitivity, it was noted that all of the boys enjoy rhymes and poetry.

Strengths and limitations can be observed in each of the experiences associated with successful reading from the school. Some excellent fiction, poetry and non-fiction texts are used in the boys' classrooms during their reading lessons; however, ICT texts and reading materials from the outside world are under-used, and sustained reading of texts for pleasure is not prioritised. Structured class and group reading programmes sometimes challenge the boys; however, the boys do not have individual reading programmes starting from the knowledge, skills and understandings of reading that they already have. During whole class sessions (shared reading), the boys sometimes have questions targeted to them and follow up questions which extend their thinking; however, this is not consistent and on other occasions the boys answer questions which have been directed to the whole class and do not develop their learning. The boys' own attempts at reading are scaffolded during group sessions (guided reading); however, these interactions are not individualised and can be interrupted.

A publication which offers a critical examination of the NLS (Powling et al 2003) makes a number of proposals to improve literacy teaching in schools. Initiatives which are suggested for immediate implementation and which are concerned with reading are the following: regular reading aloud by the teacher for pleasure not pedagogy; regular 'silent' reading by the children of self-chosen books; regular 'browsing' sessions; special events such as book weeks, poetry days and author visits; the promotion of book ownership in acknowledgement that the books children own are the ones they re-read; encouraging library membership (2003:18-9). I would argue that the data presented in this chapter indicates that these aspects of learning to read are present in the six boys' homes and are only present in their schools in a limited way. At home, extended reading of texts for pleasure is prioritised, including texts being read to the boys and the boys reading and re-reading texts for themselves. In addition, the boys own books, spend time browsing through these and are members of libraries. The only initiative which is present in schools and not in homes is the initiative on special events; something which could not be organised in homes. At school, the above aspects of reading are separated from the teaching of reading and have a lower priority.

It can be seen, then, that those experiences and behaviours most securely in place are those from the home, and that the child is self-motivated. Further, important aspects of learning to read are more evident in the boys' homes than in their schools. I would therefore argue that the boys' reading is developed most significantly at home by living in a 'reading family'.

Chapter 6: Overcoming negative gender influences

In chapter 2, literature on boys' reading showed that there are many negative influences associated with the combined experiences of reading and of being a boy. In general, boys read less than girls and have different reading preferences to girls; further, school reading resources rarely include boys' preferred texts for reading. At home, parents have lower expectations for boys in reading than for girls and boys see reading as being predominantly linked to a female identity. At school, boys are under pressure from their peers not to achieve in reading, current teaching methods may not suit their learning style and, as noted, their reading preferences are frequently absent from the reading curriculum. At the end of chapter 2, the following research questions were posed: What are the social and cultural influences on the reading experience of young successful boy readers? What are the reading habits and preferences of young successful boy readers? What patterns emerge in the reading experience of young successful boy readers? In this chapter, the data collected from the six boys will be examined in an attempt to address these questions. Specifically in this chapter, I want to explore how the boys overcome the negative influences associated with reading and being a boy in order to become young successful readers.

6.1 Boys' reading habits

In this section, the six boys' reading habits will be examined. Their reading will be analysed against the literature on boys' reading habits discussed in chapter 2. One negative aspect identified in the literature is that boys read less than girls. It was also seen that boys have different preferences to girls in the reading of books, periodicals and new literacies, although having different reading preferences to girls is not a

negative aspect in itself. In this section, the quantity of the six boys' book reading will be considered and the boys' reading of books, periodicals and new literacies will be examined. This data will be used for two purposes. Firstly, to show whether or not the six boys' reading is typical of that of other boys. Given that their success makes them different from some other boys, it will be interesting to see whether or not their reading habits conform to those of other boys. It might be speculated that since the boys are successful readers, they may overcome negative gender influences by displaying feminised reading habits. Secondly, the data will be used to examine whether the six boys' reading preferences are used in school. Boys' preferred texts being absent from the school curriculum was identified as a negative gender aspect associated with the school; the data will be used to discuss this aspect in section 6.3.3 below. (The data in this section will only include reading the boys choose to do, not that which they are required to do by their schools.)

6.1.1 Quantity of book reading

The research studied in chapter 2 indicates that boys read fewer books than girls and more boys are non readers than girls.

The data from this study indicates that the six boys are all regular book readers. The data discussed in the previous chapter suggests that the boys read large numbers of books; for example, the boys read books with their parents and siblings, read and re-read their own collections of books in their leisure time and are regular library users.

I would therefore suggest that, for the six boys, this negative aspect is not evident. The boys are certainly not non readers and the data indicates that they read large numbers of books. In this way, then, the six boys are different to some other boys.

6.1.2 Book reading preferences

The research studied in chapter 2 shows two trends in boys' and girls' book reading preferences; boys and girls prefer different fiction texts (although there is some overlap with adventure and humour genres and with the authors Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton), and boys enjoy non-fiction texts more than girls. Boys' preferred fiction genres are action/adventure, comedy/humour, science fiction/fantasy and horror/ghost fiction, and their non-fiction reading is associated with their wider interests.

The six boys in this study all enjoy action/adventure and comedy/humour genres, but no mention is made of science fiction/fantasy or horror/ghost fiction genres. This could be related to their age; they are possibly too young to have become interested in these genres. Roald Dahl is a popular author with the six boys; four of the boys enjoy reading books by Dahl and they are all familiar with Dahl stories and have watched films of his books. The boys' fiction reading, then, appears to be similar to that of other boys.

The data collected from the boys indicates that they have a good knowledge of young children's literature; they recognise familiar authors and book characters. On one of the home visits, I showed the boys a selection of books and asked whether or not they would borrow each from a library. The data collected from these conversations indicates that the boys are familiar with many children's authors and books. This can

be illustrated by examining the boys' responses when shown the *Elmer Joke Book* by David McKee and *Football Crazy* by Colin McNaughton. Responses to the *Elmer Joke Book* indicate that all of the boys recognise Elmer (there are many books about Elmer the elephant), three of the boys have heard of David McKee and two of the boys know that *Not Now, Bernard* is by the same author. Responses to *Football Crazy* indicate that five of the boys are familiar with the author and know that *Oops!* or *Suddenly!* are by the same author. The boys are also familiar with other authors and can name books written by them, including Raymond Briggs, Anthony Browne, Babette Cole and Roald Dahl. Familiarity with authors is significant since it gives the boys a degree of control over their reading choices. They can look out for books by authors with whom they are familiar and whose books they have enjoyed before, thus they are more likely to choose books which they will enjoy reading. The boys also show particular interest in fiction which is related to their non-fiction interest areas; they are all enthusiastic about *Football Crazy* by Colin McNaughton because it is about football, and they all show an interest in *Space Race* by Malorie Blackman because it is about space.

The six boys all enjoy reading non-fiction books. Four subject areas dominate the boys' non-fiction book reading: space, football, dinosaurs and animals/minibeasts. In addition to these subject areas, the boys also enjoy reading reference materials, including encyclopaedias, dictionaries and atlases. The data collected from the boys indicates that they have good knowledge on their interest areas. Illustrations of this come from Timo who is a young expert on the subject of space. When he read *The Stars* to me, he commented, 'and they shine at the daytime but you can't see them.' Then when reading *Spaceships*, he told me, 'I know all about space. ... I'm just

seeing if there's anything they haven't put in or anything they've got wrong.' Timo read the section on the Hubble telescope, then we talked about what it did and Timo used the picture to explain to me how it works – he talked about the solar panels and how the images go down to earth. Timo is so confident of his knowledge on space that when he reads non-fiction books on the subject, he checks their scope and accuracy, and adds information of his own. He is demonstrating advanced reading skills, using his knowledge to critically evaluate and question texts.

The boys, then, read non-fiction books to find out information about their interest areas, and these appear to be dominated by boy interest areas (space, football, dinosaurs). The six boys show little interest in subjects perceived to be girl interest areas. It was speculated above that since the boys are successful readers, they may overcome negative gender influences by displaying feminised reading habits; they may be 'honorary girls'. It might also have been speculated that, since they are enthusiastic readers, their enthusiasm might have extended to any text. However, their responses to a book on ballet illustrate that neither of these speculations is the case. When shown a book titled *Starting Ballet* and asked whether or not they would borrow it from a library, only one of the boys (Barnaby) said that he would borrow this book, and he added that he would borrow it for his sister. Their reasons for not borrowing the book were as follows:

because it's about ballet. (Aidan)

I don't really like ballet. (Harry)

It's all about ballerinas. Only girls do that. (Jacob)

because I don't like ballet dancing. (Joe)

because I don't like dancing. (Timo)

The boys clearly felt this was a book for girls, despite boys and men being represented in the book, including on the front cover. Many of the boys made comments associating it with female family members:

My sister would like it 'cause she does ballet. (Aidan)

(Called sister), I've got a ballet book. (Barnaby)

Mummy would like that one. (Timo)

The data suggests, then, that the six boys' book reading preferences are similar to those of other boys. They enjoy adventure and humorous fiction books. They enjoy reading non-fiction and read books associated with their wider interests. Through their fiction reading the boys have a good knowledge of young children's literature and through their non-fiction reading they have good knowledge on their masculine interest areas. In addition, the boys know their own minds and are confident about expressing their views.

6.1.3 Periodical reading

The research studied in chapter 2 noted that boys enjoy reading comics and newspapers, and their magazine reading focuses on football and computers.

All of the boys are regular readers of periodicals. Four of the boys regularly read newspapers and their reading centres on the sports pages for football match reports and league tables. A number of magazines were mentioned and this reading focuses on the following subject areas: football (*Match*, football club programmes), characters from popular culture (*Pokemon, Digimon, Captain Scarlett*), making things (*Art Attack, Lego*), dinosaurs (*Dinosaurs*) and trains (no specific titles). Two comics were mentioned: *The Beano* and *The Funday Times* (comic insert from *The Sunday Times*). Like their non-fiction book reading, the boys' newspaper and magazine reading is related to their interest areas and, again, these appear to be dominated by boy interest areas; football and characters from popular culture which are marketed at boys particularly dominate.

This data supports Millard's (1997) finding that boys' magazine reading centres on football. However, these boys did not mention computer magazines. An explanation for this could be that the children in Millard's study were older than the children in this study (aged 11-12 years). The boys in this study have a wider range of interests and their periodical reading reflects this. *The Beano* is read by many of the boys, and the value of reading this comic has been discussed by two theorists, both of whom had a child who was an avid *Beano* reader (Rosen 1996, Bromley 2000). Bromley's daughter, for example, recognises the use of jokes, puns and alliteration, a variety of 'voices' within the comic and intertextuality in the comic. Bromley summarises that,

the authors of the *Beano* recognise that children want to be 'knowers of things', and that being in the know is empowering and can be used to influence those around you. (2000:35)

This is an interesting analysis because the boys in this study like to be 'knowers of things'. Bromley also notes that children get pleasure from sustained re-readings of the Beano; in the previous chapter it was noted that the boys know that texts are re-readable and that they return to them in their leisure time with some enjoyment. The *Beano*, then, offers many opportunities to develop reading.

In the previous chapter it was also noted that the boys engage in reading-related games in their leisure time and that this includes *Top Trump* games and *Pokemon* cards. These games are likely to be considered games played largely by boys. *Top Trump* games are clearly marketed at boys; the range currently on offer includes sports cars, dinosaurs, European footballers, sharks and military jets. These games focus on the reading of facts. It was noted above that boys read football texts for statistical and biographical information, and these games involve a similar type of reading. Each *Top Trump* card represents an individual person or item and the game is played by comparing the statistical facts on the cards. Each *Pokemon* card represents a particular character and provides biographical data-like information about that character. It seems, then, that these types of games reinforce the boys' masculine interest areas and ways of reading in similar ways to that of their periodical reading.

This data suggests that, again, the six boys' reading of periodicals is similar to that of other boys. They read newspapers, magazines and comics. Their reading of

periodicals, and many reading-related games that they play, supports their masculine interest areas.

6.1.4 New literacies

The research discussed in chapter 2 noted that boys spend more time on computers than girls. Whilst not all of their activities on the computer involve reading text, their interest in computers does impact on their reading; they are learning to read 'the language of the screen' and they support their interest by reading computer-related materials; for example, magazines and game instructions.

Five of the families had computers at home and the boys in these families all read computer-based texts. Four of the boys had internet access on their computers and the websites most frequently mentioned focus on the following subject areas: football (Liverpool and Aston Villa websites, football sticker book websites), characters from popular culture (*Pokemon* website, *Harry Potter* website), making things (*Lego* website), animals and insects (no specific websites) and TV links (*Blue Peter* website, *CITV* website). The boys also mentioned Dorling Kindersley software (including *My First Dictionary*), Microsoft *Encarta* (an on-screen encyclopaedia) and Disney software (*Toy Story/Bug's Life/Winnie the Pooh*).

This data supports the reading habits identified above. The boys' reading on the computer engages their interest and supports their masculine interest areas, particularly football and characters from popular culture. They also enjoy reading reference materials (dictionary, encyclopaedia).

This data suggests that, like other boys, the six boys enjoy playing on computers. However, the data also suggests that perhaps these boys spend more time on websites and software which require reading than other boys; the literature suggested that games dominate many boys' computer use (see section 2.1.4).

6.1.5 The place of football texts in the boys' reading

The particularly dominant place of football in the non-fiction reading of five of the boys is worthy of further discussion. (The one boy who did not express a particular interest in football has an interest in basketball.) Football texts were noted in the boys' reading of books, periodicals and ICT texts. This interest developed over the two year period of data collection and, for some boys, by the end of this period, it dominated their non-fiction reading for pleasure. At the end of the data collection period (Summer 2002) the football World Cup was in progress and this had a major impact on the boys' reading; many texts for children were published to accompany the World Cup and the boys had many of these.

This dominance of football will be illustrated using the data collected from two boys; Aidan and Harry. In the reading log that Aidan completed, all of the non-fiction book and periodical reading which he noted is football-related:

UEFA Champion's League

FA Premier League

England World Cup 2002

World Cup 2002

Liverpool monthly magazine

Match magazine

The first four of these are sticker books and the final two are magazines. (These sticker books contain a lot of information as well as spaces for the stickers.) Aidan's mother told me that he reads football reports in newspapers, and league tables in newspapers and on teletext. He also looks at the websites for his football sticker books and the Liverpool football club website. In the reading diary, Aidan's mother wrote:

> Aidan particularly enjoys reading information about football. He has four football sticker books and spends ages reading the information in them (*England World Cup 2002, FA Premier League, Korea/Japan, UEFA Champion's League*). He also has football games on a *Playstation* (*FIFA 2001, FIFA 98, Superstar Soccer Pro.*). He spends ages reading the information and comparing the facts in the sticker books and the facts in the games.

The reading log that Harry completed included the following football texts:

> *The Official FA Premier League*
>
> *Man Utd* annual
>
> *World Cup Heroes*

Two of these are sticker books and the other is an annual. Harry's mother told me that he also reads the sports sections of newspapers, especially about Manchester United and England, and that he uses his father's laptop to write football reports and copy

sections out of his Manchester United album. He also loves reading football sticker books and other football books; he has *David Beckham – my story* and has ordered a *Soccer Skills* book from school. These important texts help the boys to develop a sense of themselves as boys who are football enthusiasts as well as readers.

The dominant place of football in the boys' reading supports research discussed in chapter 2. Like the boys in Hall and Coles' study (2001), the boys in this study use non-fiction texts to gain statistical and biographical information about football. The descriptions of the boys' football reading which are presented here provide a picture of the boys as investigators or researchers. They read to find out facts, compare facts from different sources and make notes of these facts.

To summarise this section on the boys' reading habits, the six boys' reading does conform to that of other boys. They read more than some other boys, but the content of their reading is similar to that of many other boys. Their success in reading, then, is not because they have feminised reading habits. The data from this section will be used below; it will be seen that the boys use their reading in the classroom to overcome peer pressure (section 6.3.1) and that the boys' reading preferences are frequently absent from the school curriculum (section 6.3.3).

6.2 Boys' reading at home

In chapter 2, negative gender influences from the home were identified as being that parents have lower expectations for boys in reading than for girls and that boys see reading as being predominantly linked to a female identity. It was noted that boys need to see their fathers reading in the home, and that they may be influenced by the

reading of their siblings. This section will consider whether these negative influences are present for the boys and, if they are, how the boys overcome them.

6.2.1 Parental expectation

In chapter 2, it was noted that if parents have low expectations of their son's reading, their behaviour will reinforce this in subtle ways; for example, they will buy fewer literacy materials as presents for boys, and they will engage in literacy activities less frequently with boys.

Data presented in the previous chapter shows that the parents of the boys in this study buy reading materials for their sons and engage in a considerable amount of reading activities with them. The boys' parents want their sons to do well in reading and this is reinforced in additional ways; for example, they support their school reading and they take them to libraries. This data would suggest, then, that the parents do not have low expectations of their son's reading.

Whilst it was not possible to compare the parents' attitudes regarding their expectations of boys compared with those of girls, the data seems to suggest that the negative aspect of parents having low expectations of boys is not present for the six boys in this study.

6.2.2 Role models

In chapter 2, it was noted that children regard reading as a female activity; they see female family members read in the home and they regard female family members as those who taught them to read.

The boys in this study see male, as well as female, family members reading. Data presented in the previous chapter (see section 5.1.3.1) showed that the boys see their parents reading. Looking back at this data, it can be seen that all of the data makes reference to fathers, as well as mothers, reading.

In addition, the boys in this study all have male family members who read to them and listen to them reading. All of the boys have fathers who take on this role. Where necessary, their fathers make efforts to get home from work in time to do this, or they consciously read with their sons at the weekend and in the holidays. The following quotes, which illustrate the involvement of the boys' fathers, are taken from the initial home visits and the reading diaries:

> yes we have (always read to him) … my husband and myself … He always used
>
> to try and get back to read them a story
>
> (Aidan's mother)

> you make up for it at weekends … and in holidays …it's a conscious effort.
>
> And Chris (father) likes to tell them stories without actually reading to them.
>
> Stories that they know, that they read in a book, but then retelling
>
> (Barnaby's mother)
>
> Dad bought Barnaby a box set of Dick King-Smith books. Barnaby was
>
> delighted to find that he can read at least one of the books himself and likes to
>
> read some of it before Mum or Dad reads the bedtime story.
>
> (Reading diary)

... then I sit with him and get him to read the book or he'll sit with his dad.

... sometimes he'll say I want to read to daddy so I say, fine, you read to daddy then.

(Harry's mother)

I do now but Paul (father) did a lot as well because he was here in the day.

(Jacob's mother)

Also he has had a couple of bedtime stories with his dad.

(Reading diary)

Both of us. We don't take it in turns as such but he might be late back one night so I do it that night then maybe the next night I've sort of started the tea or something so he goes up and does it ... he's brilliant with the kids really ... that's why he likes to read with them, because it gives him a chance to sit and have a talk to them, ask them what they've done and what have you

(Joe's mother)

Probably me in the early days a lot more, certainly at night, going to bed and things ... To sit in the bedroom and then we read a book

(Timo's father)

These extracts illustrate that the fathers contribute in a number of ways; as well as reading to the boys and listening to them reading, they also engage in activities such as oral story-telling, reading and talking with the boys, and buying books for the boys.

This builds up a picture of fathers who are involved in and committed to their sons' reading, who are willing to share knowledge with them and who are therefore also encouraging their sons to share with them a discourse about texts.

In some cases, grandfathers are also involved in reading to the boys and listening to them read:

> my mum and dad in particular stay, so my dad reads as well
>
> (Aidan's mother)

> And I've found out since that my father ... always made an effort to get home from work to read us a bedtime story ... my mother said that it was my father that used to read us the books in the evening a lot
>
> (Timo's father)
>
> He (grandfather) also reads to me
>
> (Timo)

Both Aidan and Timo have grandfathers who read with them regularly. It is interesting to note that Timo's grandfather had read with his own son, and now he reads with his son, carrying on the family pattern. This data echoes that of Minns' (1990) discussed in chapter 2; Reid's father read stories to him and now he reads stories to his children. Like Reid's father, Timo's father is continuing a male reading event into a third generation.

The data from this study, then, suggests that this negative aspect is not present for these boys. In their homes, they see men reading and men read to and with them. This may suggest that the boys' families are not typical in this way. Reading is a male and female activity in the boys' homes, giving them the message that reading can be linked to a masculine, as well as feminine, identity.

6.2.2.1 Fathers as role models

In this section it will be seen that the boys use their fathers as role models; having observed their fathers reading, they imitate many of their fathers reading practices.

This is most strongly evident in the boys' non-fiction reading choices and can be illustrated by examining the data from Harry. Harry's father is interested in history and English literature. Despite having no formal qualifications in these areas, he is extremely knowledgeable; for example, he quotes Shakespeare plays in our research conversations. He has a particular interest in military history, and owns many books about aeroplanes, guns and tanks. Often when he reads these books, Harry will join him. Harry's mother comments,

> Quite often, if I'm watching something on the television, Harry's Dad will sit at the table or on the chair with a book of some description. He likes factual things, be it about aeroplanes, or guns, or Romans. Harry sits on his Dad's lap and says, oh Dad, what's this and this? So he'll sit with his Dad. So he quite often sits on his Dad's lap and takes over. So that's something he does with his Dad.

When asked about his favourite non-fiction books, Harry says that he likes books about 'olden day's armies'; when listing things he reads at home, Harry includes books about wars; and entries in his reading log include *The Submachine Gun* and *German Secret Weapons*. Harry's father's reading interests are clearly reflected in Harry's own choices.

There is evidence of other boys imitating their fathers' reading practices; for example, Joe shares his father's interest in biological science, and four of the boys imitate their fathers' newspaper reading habits.

This data supports the work of Clark (1976) and Minns (1990, 1993) that boys use their fathers as role models for their own reading. The data further illustrates that the six boys do not regard reading as a female pursuit; they are aware that their fathers are readers and they closely observe and reflect many of their fathers' reading practices.

6.6.2.2 Siblings as role models

In chapter 2, it was noted that boys may have a more positive view of themselves as readers if they live with siblings who are frequent readers. This suggests that older siblings also act as role models for boys.

Detailed data was not collected on siblings' reading; however, two of the boys have older siblings (one brother and one sister) who appear to be enthusiastic readers. During my visits, they both showed me books that they owned and were eager to tell me about their reading. Data presented in the previous chapter does suggest that Aidan's sister was a role model for him:

Amy (sister) used to come home with a book and we always sat down ... It

was an enjoyment thing for all of us ... when he bought a book home from

school he'd say, 'Oh look, like Amy used to have' and he was really chuffed

... and they'd have a real chat about it.

(Aidan's mother)

Aidan used to listen to his sister reading her school book and was pleased when he

had a school book like hers. Five of the boys have younger siblings who are still at

early stages of learning to read and are not, therefore, likely to be role models.

Clearly claims cannot be made on such limited data; however, data does suggest that

two of the boys live with siblings who may be role models for them.

6.3 Boys' reading at school

In chapter 2, negative gender influences from the school were identified as being that

boys are under pressure from their peers not to achieve in reading, current teaching

methods may not suit their learning style and their reading preferences are frequently

absent from the reading curriculum. This section will consider whether these negative

influences are present for the boys and, if they are, how the boys overcome them.

6.3.1 Peer pressure

In chapter 2, it was noted that boys are under pressure from other boys to appear to do

little or no work and this is exacerbated in reading since boys associate reading with a

feminine identity. This research clearly indicates a negative influence on boys'

reading performance. Boys are less likely to achieve highly in reading if they are

under pressure to be seen to do little or no work, and if it will make them unpopular with their peers.

The data presented in this section will show that the six boys in this study overcome the negative effects of peer pressure in two very particular ways. Firstly, they use their knowledge of masculine interest areas and popular culture, gained through their reading, to build relationships with other boys and make themselves popular. Secondly, they use their knowledge about reading, also gained through their reading, to teach other children and have a powerful position in the classroom. They therefore use their reading to give them a high status in the classroom; the boys have respect from their peers, particularly other boys. Reading, then, is desirable to the six boys because successful reading contributes to this high status position; this influences the boys more than pressure from their peers not to do well in reading.

6.3.1.1 The boys using reading to make themselves popular with their peers

It was seen above that the boys' non-fiction reading gives them considerable knowledge in their boy interest areas; for example, football and space. The boys also have good general knowledge; as well as subject specific books, it was seen that the boys read reference materials such as encyclopaedias, dictionaries and atlases. The boys then use their knowledge in the classroom to build relationships with other boys and make themselves popular.

This can be illustrated through their football reading. It was noted that the boys read a variety of non-fiction texts to gain statistical and biographical information about football; they read to find out facts, compare facts from different sources and make

notes of these facts. Subsequently, in the classroom, the boys share these facts with other children, particularly other boys, and in this way they build relationships with their peers. It was also noted that the boys have an interest in football World Cup sticker books. Particular social practices accompany this text-type; stickers are discussed and swapped in the playground, usually with other boys. Moss and Attar (1999) note that, for boys, particular books become status objects and that around these 'they do status politics' (discussed in section 2.3.1). I would suggest that this is the case with these football sticker books. The books are status objects and the six boys discuss and swap stickers with other boys, and this is another way in which they build relationships with their peers.

The boys also use their general knowledge in the classroom. This can be illustrated from observations made on the second school visits when each of the boys was observed in a literacy lesson. The following references to general knowledge were made in the notes written up following the observations:

Aidan showed that he has good general knowledge – knowing what nectar is.

Harry chatted throughout this session, using lots of general knowledge (skunk, gorilla, blue whale). He has good general knowledge that he applies to contexts when reading.

Timo applied his general knowledge to the context (ripe and unripe fruit). He used his general knowledge (aphids are insects or bugs).

These examples illustrate that the boys remember the facts they read, can apply them new contexts and enjoy sharing their knowledge with others. In addition to using their general knowledge in these literacy lessons, there are additional references in the data to the boys using their general knowledge in the classroom. This quote from Harry's teacher is one illustration:

> we were talking about icebergs and one or two of them said, 'What's an iceberg?' and while I was trying to explain what an iceberg is, Harry said, 'You know, at the beginning of the century when the *Titanic* hit one' and he was going on and had all this knowledge about the *Titanic* which, of course, was going over the rest of their heads because they were still trying to think, well, what's an iceberg? His knowledge is pretty amazing.

Thus, the boys use their knowledge in the classroom, and this gives them an identity as a knowledgeable person, and the pleasure of having knowledge that no-one else in the class possesses. It is interesting that this identity gives them a high status in the classroom, rather than the low status which would be associated with an anti-swot culture. One possible explanation for this is that much of the boys' knowledge is in masculine popular culture. The boys gain popularity and respect because they are knowledgeable in areas such as football and *Pokemon*. To illustrate this further, it is unimaginable that the boys would gain such popularity and respect with other boys if their knowledge was in girl popular culture such as ballet and *Barbie*. The boys' reading, then, offers them opportunities for building friendships and supporting their peers.

6.3.1.2 The boys using reading to make themselves powerful in the classroom

It was seen above that, through their fiction reading, the boys have good knowledge of young children's literature. In addition, since they are successful readers, their knowledge, skills and understandings about reading are in advance of many of their peers. In chapter 1, it was noted that, regarding literacy learning, adults, or more experienced literacy-users, model literacy practices and scaffold children's early literacy attempts. In their classrooms, the six boys take on a teaching role as more experienced literacy-users. They model reading by reading out loud to groups of children, and they scaffold reading by answering other children's questions and correcting their miscues and errors. The six boys, then, take on the role of a teacher in the classroom, teaching reading to other children. This gives the boys a powerful position in the classroom. This powerful position, again, gives the boys a high status in the classroom and respect from their peers.

This data supports the work of Clark (1976) and Stainthorp and Hughes (1999) which discusses how early readers are often considered leaders in the classroom and shows that their teachers feel that the presence of these young early readers in the classroom raises the standard of the whole class since they are often used as role models for other children (discussed in chapter 1). The following sections provide examples of the six boys modelling and scaffolding reading to other children in the class.

6.3.1.2.1 The boys modelling reading for other children

There are many examples in the data of the six boys reading aloud to the whole class, either during the shared reading part of the literacy lesson or during the plenary:

Shared reading

Aidan was chosen to read verse 2 of the poem out loud, which he did with lots of expression.

Shared reading

The more able, I get them to read maybe two or three sentences, even maybe a part of a page of the book ... to encourage the other children to respond and join in.

Aidan's Year 2 teacher

Plenary

Barnaby was asked to read out his completed story ... He read it out to the class ... good parts were identified.

Plenary

Joe read his work to the class; he was keen to do this and read confidently.

Shared reading

with the shared reading, it's maybe relying on them more to model to their peers; reading with expression, reading at a decent pace and discussing different reading strategies

Jacob's Year 2 teacher

In addition, Jacob's teacher used his work as a model for other children:

The teacher used Jacob's work to demonstrate to the other children:

She looked at two children's work and noted that their answers did not answer the question. She then looked at Jacob's work. Jacob had written 'The mice make their homes in our houses' and she pointed out to the group that this did answer the question.

Jacob's Year 1 teacher

These boys, then, are used in the classroom to model effective reading practices. They read aloud to their peers, from texts and from their own work, and their work is used as a model for others.

6.3.1.2.2 The boys scaffolding reading for other children

The data from classroom observations shows many examples of the boys scaffolding other children's attempts at reading:

Like if I say 'what's this?' and I draw an exclamation mark and they say 'It's an exclamation mark' but they wouldn't really know what it was for. So I'd say 'Right, Aidan, come on, tell us.'

Two other children asked Harry a word they couldn't read and he was able to tell them the word (aphids).

Another child read *The Whale*. Harry helped the child. When she read 'but soon', he corrected it to 'but very soon'. He told her the word 'isle'.

He was chatting to others on the table about what they were doing. Jacob was

quite dominant – telling the others what they should and shouldn't be doing regarding the task, e.g. 'you don't have to do a box for the contents', 'you don't spell 'time' like that'.

Jacob frequently corrected other children's reading, for example, correcting 'question' to 'quest', correcting 'hurry' to 'hooray', telling a child the word 'gnome'. He was also reminding children when it was their turn to read. He took on the teacher's role when other children were reading.

The other children often say 'ask Timo' if they don't know a word.

This data shows the boys scaffolding other children's reading by explaining about punctuation marks, answering their questions about words, correcting their reading, and explaining and monitoring tasks. In addition, the boys' teachers commented that they use the boys to support other children's learning:

the children who sit up in the blue corner, which is the lowest ability, they have words to do every day, and the children in the red group, they help them with their words. … They quite like doing that.

Aidan's Year 1 teacher

using that group (more able readers) to explain, in perhaps more child-friendly terms than I could, what's going on in the book … telling other people how they know what a word says, what a word means and just looking at the more adventurous vocabulary

Jacob's Year 2 teacher

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I ask the more able readers to actually help some of the less able ones ... And they love doing that. They love the role of the teacher

Joe's Year 2 teacher

with Timo, you've just got to say, 'I rely on you to really show everybody else just what I expect' and he'll do it.

Timo's Year 2 teacher

These teachers recognise that the boys enjoy taking on the role of the teacher and that they may be able to explain concepts to their peers more clearly than the teachers themselves can. The boys, as more-experienced literacy users, guide other children through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; see section 1.2.2.2). They are helping other children perform at a more advanced level through their interactions with them.

The notion of reading status in the classroom is discussed by Moss (2000). She notes that when boys are given a low status as a reader in the classroom they spend less time on their reading and develop a less strong commitment to reading. The boys in this study appear to illustrate the opposite of this. They have a high status as a reader in the classroom and as a result they spend more time reading and have a strong commitment to reading.

6.3.2 Boys' preferred learning styles

In chapter 2, it was noted that boys prefer experiential learning styles, physical involvement in learning activities, have positive attitudes to short term goals and immediate rewards, and are less comfortable at being reflective learners. It was noted that some aspects of the Literacy Hour appear to support boys' learning styles, whilst other aspects do not; short parts within the hour, clear learning objectives and explicit teaching support some boys, whilst the passive nature of the hour does not support physically active boys.

The data presented in this section will show that the six boys have a particular learning style; they are competitive, self-motivated learners who are able to teach themselves lessons about reading. In this way, the boys are not typical of some other boys, and it is likely that this particular learning style helps these boys overcome any negative associations between the way reading is taught in schools and being a boy; being competitive and self-motivated ensures that they learn effectively regardless of factors such as whether they are physically active and whether they are presented with clear goals and immediate rewards.

6.3.2.1 The boys as competitive learners

It has already been noted that graded reading schemes are used in all four schools. This allows children (and others) to monitor the progress of their reading, and to compare their reading with that of other children. Data from conversations with the boys indicates that they all know that they are good at reading and that they are pleased about this:

I like being better than my friends at reading. ... I keep it a secret.

(Aidan)

I like being a good reader.

(Barnaby)

I am the second best reader in my class. ... I like being good at reading. ...

Sometimes I tell people which book I'm on.

(Harry)

I like being better than my friends at reading.

(Jacob)

I like being good at reading.

(Joe)

I talk to my friends about what book we're on.

(Timo)

The boys know which scheme level they are on, are pleased when they progress onto

the next level and know whether or not any children are ahead of them. In some cases

this is discussed with other children and in some cases it is not. Whilst Harry and

Timo talk with their friends about the books they are on, Aidan keeps it a secret.

Aidan did not give a reason for this. However, Aidan's mother told me that she does

not talk with Aidan about his advanced achievement because she does not want him to

become 'big-headed'; perhaps Aidan is aware of this and keeps his achievement 'a secret' because he does not want to be considered 'big-headed' by others. The boys are all eager to be one of the more advanced readers in their classes. This competitive element is likely to contribute to the boys' reading success; they push themselves in order to achieve success and keep ahead of their peers.

The notion of the boys as competitive learners who compare their reading ability with other children is reinforced by comments from their teachers:

> They know they can (read the text) and they want to show the others that they can.
>
> Aidan's Year 2 teacher

> They are quite competitive about their reading ability anyway, they wouldn't hide it and they are quite proud that they can read and they use that as a plus rather than a negative.
>
> Barnaby's Year 2 teacher (about Barnaby and Joe)

> I think he's a bit guilty of taking the big ... hardback book home because he thinks that means he's cleverer
>
> Jacob's Year 2 teacher

> You can't stop them comparing, can you?
>
> Timo's Year 1 teacher

Jacob's teacher links this competitive aspect to their gender. He clearly believes that it being competitive is a masculine attribute:

> boys being boys, it's just something else for them to get competitive about, isn't it?
>
> Jacob's Year 2 teacher

As well as being ahead of the other children, Aidan also enjoys keeping ahead of his teacher. The teacher was reading a Roald Dahl story to the class and Aidan was reading it at home. He told her that he was trying to read it more quickly than she was reading it to the class:

> He's told me. He said 'I want to beat you on my chapter and I can go past you.'
>
> Aidan's Year 2 teacher

Aidan's language, that he wants to 'beat' his teacher and 'go past' her, is that usually associated with a competitive race. This competitive aspect to the boys' reading means that the boys are self-motivated learners; in order to keep ahead, the boys want to read. This notion will now be explored further.

6.3.2.2 The boys as self-motivated learners

When observed in school reading lessons, the boys demonstrate that they are self-motivated learners; they exhibit enthusiastic reading behaviour for extended periods

of time and are able to work successfully with or without an adult. The following data is taken from field notes made during observations of the boys in reading lessons:

Aidan settled to the task and completed the sentences quickly. ...

Aidan was following the text while other children were reading – at times he also looked forward through the book.

Aidan, guided reading

Harry was attentive and clearly loved reading the book ... he continually looked forwards and backwards through it. ...

He seems self-motivated and engages in a lot of dialogue with himself rather than being focused around the adult. He seems to be quite an independent reader – he was clearly reading for the love of it and often chatted to himself about the book rather than relying on the adult's input.

Harry, guided reading

Jacob was extremely well motivated and completed a lengthy task (making a non-fiction book about mice). He was confident and chatted to other children about the task, both to direct other children and to seek help when he was uncertain. ... He was eager to complete the task and did complete all the pages in his book.

Jacob, independent work

The boys become engrossed in their reading and reading activities; they complete their work quickly, read ahead through their books, talk to themselves and those

around them about their books and take on the role of the teacher (discussed above). The notion of the boys as self-motivated learners is supported by their teachers:

Joe and Barnaby have the attitude that they will progress well at school. You know, they understand the value of it.

Barnaby's Year 1 teacher

They are so enthusiastic about it (reading). I think that helps. ... There's a way to learn and a way to find things out and they see that as a key to independence. That's why they enjoy it so much.

Barnaby's Year 2 teacher

I think because he can read well, that's what he does. It's like all children. If they can do something well, they tend to want to do it more.

Harry's Year 1 teacher

He'll read anything and everything, he loves stories.

they (Harry and Timo) read because they're getting something out of it. It's giving them something.

Harry's Year 2 teacher

I think he's aware of his abilities as a reader and likes the attention that comes with it.

Jacob's Year 2 teacher

He always likes to get his work done.

he works hard, wants to achieve and enjoys success.

Joe's Year 1 teacher

We've done lots of non-fiction work this term which he's really enjoyed ...

he's most thirsty for knowledge really.

He likes to know what he's got to go and do and it's all got to be just so.

Timo's Year 2 teacher

These teachers provide some reasons as to why the boys are self-motivated: they

understand the value of doing well, they want to be independent learners, they enjoy

success, they get something out of reading, they like the attention that comes with

high achievement, and they want the knowledge that they can get from books. Some

of these factors are general learning factors and some are specifically related to

reading. Regarding reading, it seems that the boys are motivated to read because they

know that books contain things they want; for example, information, excitement,

humour.

Aidan also showed self-motivation by asking his teacher if he could borrow the class

reader:

He said to me last week, 'You know your book you've got, can I borrow it?'

And I said, 'What book?' And he said, '*The Twits*, can I borrow it because I

want to read it? And I said, 'Oh, OK then.' So I lent it to him. I wrote my

name inside and said, 'You can borrow this especially, OK?'

Aidan's Year 1 teacher

This data illustrates the special status these boys attain from their reading. Aidan was motivated and confident enough to make this special request of the teacher. And her response was a positive one; she agreed to his request and made it clear that this was a special event.

6.3.2.3 The boys teaching themselves lessons about reading

Self-motivated learning leads to the boys teaching themselves many lessons about reading. This is challenging to illustrate because it is difficult to show specific instances of knowledge and understanding about reading being developed and that this had not been explicitly planned or taught by the teacher. Nevertheless, the data does show three ways in which the boys develop their reading skills beyond planned lesson objectives.

Firstly, the boys develop their reading skills by applying existing knowledge and understanding about reading to new contexts. They are able to make links between new texts being read and texts they have read previously. Aidan, for example, made a comparison between an unfamiliar text (*Little Wolf*) and a familiar one (*The Jolly Postman*):

> He made inter-textual links, comparing the letter form of the book to that in
> *The Jolly Postman.*
> Aidan, guided reading

Aidan did this spontaneously; he had not been asked to make any comparison. The ability to apply existing knowledge and understanding to new contexts develops reading skills since it allows the boys to recognise patterns, formulate and test hypotheses, and to assimilate new information into that which exists. In the above case, for example, the understanding being developed is that there is a type of fiction book in which the text is written in the letter form. The boys' ability to make connections between existing knowledge and understanding and new contexts was commented upon by one of the teachers:

> He often also notices and recalls a lot of the skills that we might have done from other texts on a new one.
>
> Timo's Year 2 teacher

Secondly, the boys develop their reading skills by engaging in reading games at school. These games are not part of planned lessons; they are something the boys do in spare time at the end of lessons. Barnaby's teacher commented that he enjoys playing games with encyclopaedias and dictionaries:

> Encyclopaedias are very popular at the moment. … and dictionaries which he loves. … He plays games. Tries to find the longest words.
>
> Barnaby's Year 2 teacher

Timo's teacher said that enjoys making up word searches for his family:

> today he's come in and asked me for squared paper so he can make up some

word searches to send to relatives in Germany for Christmas

Timo's Year 2 teacher

Playing reading games improves the boys' reading skills; trying to find the longest words in a dictionary, for example, allows the development of reading skills such as word recognition, graphic knowledge and vocabulary extension.

Thirdly, the boys develop their reading skills by making explicit links between their classroom reading and their home reading; they bring their home reading experiences into the classroom and thus enhance their classroom learning. This is illustrated by Timo's Year 2 teacher:

Timo's massive on making things and we were doing instructions this term ... he bought all the instructions in (from home) when we were doing it and to say 'I read this to get to this'

When instruction texts were being examined at school, Timo brought in instructions from things he had made at home. Reading is firmly embedded in Timo's life at home and at school; making links between these contexts develops his reading skills because he is bringing a wider variety of experiences to the learning situation. He is able to draw on experiences beyond those being offered in the classroom and thus enhance his classroom learning.

The boys, then, are able to develop their reading beyond that which has been planned; they teach themselves lessons about reading. They do this by making connections

between existing knowledge and understanding about reading and new texts they read, by engaging in reading games in their school leisure time and by bringing home experiences to the classroom learning situation.

6.3.3 Resources for reading

In chapter 2, it was noted that boys' reading achievements can be negatively affected when schools use reading resources which do not match boys' reading preferences and do not take into account the vernacular reading in which boys engage outside school. Data presented earlier in this chapter (section 6.1) showed that the six boys have reading preferences similar to those of other boys; they enjoy adventure and humour fiction genres, their non-fiction reading is associated with their wider interests, they read newspapers, magazines and comics, and they read on-screen texts. It was also noted that football texts have a particularly dominant place in the boys' reading. Data presented in this section will show that this negative aspect is in place for these boys; whilst the boys' schools do use a range of fiction, poetry and non-fiction texts in accordance with statutory requirements, they do not use other texts which boys value highly.

In chapter 5, it was noted that the schools use a range of high quality fiction, poetry and non-fiction texts during their reading lessons; it was also noted that limited use is made of ICT texts and reading materials from the outside world. Looking back through the data on the six boys' preferred reading, a large amount of this reading is absent from the school reading curriculum. This includes, for example, the following: the sports pages of newspapers; magazines and websites on football and characters

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from popular culture; the *Beano*; and reading-related games such as *Top Trumps* and *Pokemon*.

A number of teachers did comment that some of these texts are available in the classroom, but it is clear that these are for informal reading in book areas and not part of the formal taught curriculum. The teachers refer to comics, magazines, football books, books with characters from popular culture and cartoon books in the following ways:

> We do have some comics, some hardback books about football, soccer, so if they want to look at those, they are there. … They are in the book corner, they can just go ahead and get them.
>
> Aidan's Year 2 teacher

> We've got a pile of magazines in my room … I don't know where they've come from to be honest, there's a great big pile of them and the boys just think they're fantastic. They'll swap them around.
>
> we've got *Power Rangers* books in my (class) library and they go around the whole class. It's like, 'can I have that when you've finished with it?'
>
> Harry's Year 2 teacher

> I've made sure that in my book corner there's some football annuals for the boys … there aren't enough male interest books … we put some cartoon books in as well.
>
> Jacob's Year 2 teacher

This data shows that many teachers are aware of boys' preferred texts, despite not using these in the formal curriculum. The teachers make value judgements and divide texts into those which are suitable for the formal teaching curriculum and those which are suitable for informal reading in book corners. This data supports previous research which has identified that boys' preferred texts are absent from the school curriculum; despite recommendations from theorists and from the government (see chapter 2, section 2.3.3), this situation appears not to have changed in these particular schools at the time of writing.

It seems, then, that there is huge scope for these schools to develop the range of texts they use in the formal reading curriculum, in order to offer what Millard (2003) calls a 'literacy of fusion'; a literacy in which children's cultural interests are merged with school requirements. During the second year of data collection, the boys in the study were particularly interested in football World Cup sticker books; a considerable amount of valuable work could have been done in the formal reading curriculum using these texts, yet they were confined to the informal location of the playground. The schools, then, could consider using boys' preferred texts, including texts from popular culture and out-of-school literacies, as part of the formal reading curriculum, rather than the current practice of including such texts only in the informal reading curriculum or not at all.

To summarise, many of the boys' preferred texts are not evident in the formal reading curriculum of these four schools. It is interesting to note, then, that despite this negative aspect being in place, the boys studied are still achieving highly in their

classrooms. This may indicate that the lack of particular texts is not a significant negative aspect; that boys can be successful readers even if their preferred texts are not used in the classroom. In fact, Moss (2000) found that the assumption that boys do less well in reading because their preferences in reading material are insufficiently represented on the curriculum was not borne out by her research project. Perhaps for these boys, this negative aspect at school is compensated for at home; they read their preferred texts at home and this ensures that they are motivated and successful readers. This would support the conclusion to the previous chapter; that the boys' homes are most significant in terms of their reading development.

6.4 Chapter conclusion

The results presented in this chapter have considered whether the negative gender influences identified in chapter 2 are present for the six boys and, if they are present, how the boys overcome them. A negative aspect regarding reading habits is that boys read less than girls; it was seen that this negative aspect is not in place for the six boys. The boys all read large numbers of texts. It was also noted that the six boys have reading habits which are similar to those of other boys.

At home, negative influences are that, in general, parents have low expectations for boys in reading and that boys see reading as being predominantly linked to a female identity. It was seen that these negative influences are not in place for the six boys. Their parents have high expectations for their reading, they see men reading and men read to and with them. In addition, they use their fathers, and possibly their siblings, as role models for reading. In these ways, the boys' homes support their reading development and they may be different to the homes of many other boys. In the

previous chapter, it was argued that the six boys' reading is developed most significantly at home by living in a reading family. The results in this chapter have added to this analysis; in such reading families, boys' reading is supported in these particular gendered ways.

At school, negative influences are that boys are under pressure from their peers not to achieve in reading, current teaching methods may not suit their learning style and their preferred texts for reading are frequently absent from the reading curriculum. It has been argued that the boys overcome the negative effects of peer pressure in particular ways. Firstly, they use their knowledge of masculine interest areas and popular culture, gained through their reading, to build relationships with other boys and make themselves popular. Secondly, they use their knowledge about reading, also gained through their reading, to teach other children and give themselves a powerful position in the classroom. They therefore use their reading to give them a high status in the classroom; the boys have respect from their peers, particularly other boys. Reading, then, is desirable to the six boys because successful reading contributes to this high status position; this influences the boys more than pressure from their peers not to do well in reading.

It has also been argued that the boys overcome negative aspects associated with boys' preferred learning styles. The six boys have a particular learning style; they are competitive, self-motivated learners who are able to teach themselves lessons about reading. It is likely that this particular learning style helps these boys to overcome any negative aspects of the way reading is taught in their schools and being a boy; being competitive and self-motivated ensures that they learn effectively regardless of factors

such as whether they are physically active and whether they are presented with clear goals and immediate rewards. Regarding boys' preferred texts being absent from the school curriculum, it was seen that this negative aspect is in place for the six boys. Despite this, the boys are still successful readers. Hence it was suggested that perhaps this negative aspect is not significant; that boys can be successful readers even if their preferred texts are not used in the classroom. Indeed, the boys' homes may compensate for this negative aspect at school; these boys spend time at home reading their preferred texts.

The results from the study will now be discussed. They will be used to construct the masculine identity of these young successful boy readers, and to consider how the reading achievements of all boys might be raised.

Conclusion and recommendations

In chapter 2, when reading and the masculine identity was discussed, it was noted that post-structural feminist thinking refers to 'multiple masculinities' (masculine identities); many ways of being a boy. Further, it was noted that if there are many masculinities, then there might be masculinities in which reading is acceptable (Rowan et al 2002). I stated that I hoped to contribute to this research by examining one way of being a boy or one version of masculinity; specifically, one in which reading is acceptable. I hoped to identify how such a masculinity is developed and the ways in which reading has a desirable place in this masculinity.

The results from the research questions can now be used to construct a masculine identity for these young successful boy readers. The six boys who were studied have a version of masculinity in which reading is acceptable; in fact, it is more than acceptable, it is desirable. The data presented in this study indicates that such a masculinity is developed by living in a reading family. The boys' reading is highly developed at home since the experiences associated with being young successful readers are present for the six boys in their homes. Their homes are rich literate environments in which the boys are talked to, have their own libraries of books, read a wealth of environmental print and are taken to local libraries. Reading, therefore, is part of everyday family life. The boys have stories and other books read to them, and observations of parent-son reading interactions show that the boys' parents scaffold their reading and support their attempts at meaning making. In addition, the boys engage in a variety of reading practices with their siblings. The boys' parents enjoy reading themselves and are keen to support the boys' school reading, thus the boys

understand that reading can be enjoyable and that school reading is important. Finally, the boys' homes appear to be emotionally warm and secure. In addition to these experiences, the boys' reading is supported in particular gendered ways: their parents have high expectations of their sons' reading development, the boys see men reading, and men read to and with them. Further, they use their fathers, and possibly their siblings, as role models for reading.

The data also indicates that reading has a desirable place in this masculinity in a number of ways. Firstly, the boys read because they gain pleasure and knowledge from their reading. They are self-motivated and read to find out information on their masculine interest areas. These boys consider reading a hobby and read in their leisure time. They particularly read texts related to football, space and characters from popular culture which are marketed to boys (for example, *Pokemon* and *Captain Scarlett*). Secondly, the boys use reading to gain a high status position in the classroom. They use their reading in ways which make them popular and powerful with their peers, particularly other boys. They share their knowledge on masculine interest areas with other boys to build relationships and make themselves popular. They also use their knowledge about reading to teach other children in the class and make themselves powerful. Hence these boys make reading work for them and, subsequently, it has a secure and positive place in their developing masculine identity.

The results of this study will now be considered in order to understand more about the ways in which the reading achievements of all boys might be raised, though it must be acknowledged that over-generalisations cannot be made. It would be unrealistic, for example, to suggest that there is one approach which can make all boys successful

readers since all boys are individuals who have different life experiences and learning needs. Bassey (1999) spoke of 'fuzzy generalisations' (discussed in chapter 3) and it is important to recognise that the generalisations made in this conclusion are 'fuzzy'. Not all young boys who are successful readers will demonstrate the developing masculine identity outlined above. Some boys will live in reading families yet may not become early successful readers. Nevertheless, I will use the results of this study to cautiously reflect on how the reading achievements of all boys might be raised.

These recommendations will particularly concern the school curriculum. In order for schools to support boys' reading teachers may need to encourage all boys to develop a masculinity in which reading is acceptable. The results of this study have indicated that such a masculinity is developed by living in a reading family. The first role of the school, then, might be to adopt, or to develop, significant aspects of the home experience and adapt these as necessary for use in the school context. Some aspects are already in place; for example, many schools are now rich literate environments with a range of high quality reading resources available in class and school libraries. Some aspects, however, are currently limited in the present school curriculum and could be developed further. Firstly, extended texts could be read for pleasure more frequently, including whole texts being read to boys and boys reading and re-reading texts for themselves. Texts could be read for pleasure as well as for pedagogical purposes and this sustained reading could be a regular, high priority part of the school day, rather than an activity which is slotted into transition periods and gaps in the school day when possible. Teachers reading extended texts to boys could reflect aspects of parents reading to their sons. Boys reading and re-reading texts for themselves could be carried out with other children. If boys share books with other

children, this activity could reflect the reading with siblings that successful boys do at home.

Secondly, boys might benefit from observing men reading in school and men reading to and with boys. This idea is not a new one, but nevertheless it remains a challenge for primary schools where there is a small number of male staff, or where there is no will to implement such a recommendation. However, the results of this study show the importance of men being involved in and committed to boys' reading and reveal that boys carefully watch men reading and imitate their reading habits. Where there is an absence of male staff, schools could consider ways of involving men from the wider school community; for example, fathers and grandfathers of school children and men from the school governing body. Offering boys role models for reading cannot be achieved purely by displaying posters of men reading. In fact, one of the schools I visited displayed the National Literacy Trust posters of football stars reading, yet when I pointed this out to the boy with whom I was reading, he had not previously noticed it. Displaying posters is tokenistic if it is not discussed with the boys and is not part of a wider initiative in schools.

Thirdly, schools could mark significant reading achievements. It was noted that in the six reading families certain events become 'rites of passage' and that this shows the boys that their reading is valued and important. Schools could imitate this behaviour, encouraging and marking significant reading occasions, such as completing a first 'reading book', reading every book by one author, or joining the local library. All of the above recommendations are particularly important for those boys for whom these aspects are absent at home.

In addition to adopting ways of celebrating reading, schools could consider educating and resourcing families so that all parents are helped to understand the crucial role they play in their son's reading development and have the resources and strategies they need to undertake this role. Schools can send information home to parents and hold workshops for parents. Many schools organise such activities; however, this is currently organised by individual schools and there is no centrally co-ordinated approach for all schools.

The results of this study have also indicated that, in a masculinity in which reading is acceptable, reading has a desirable place in a number of particular ways. The second role of the school, then, might be to encourage all boys to make reading desirable in the ways in which the six young successful boy readers in this study make it desirable. Firstly, in order for boys to gain pleasure and knowledge from their reading and to find out information on their masculine interest areas, schools could ensure that the reading resources used in the formal reading curriculum allow boys to read about these interests. This would include using high status texts from boys' vernacular reading; for example, football sticker books, *Top Trump* card games, the *Beano* and on-screen texts. Reading can be highly developed using these texts, yet they are frequently absent from the formal reading curriculum in schools. A number of theorists have previously called for boys' preferred texts and vernacular reading to be used in the classroom (see discussion in section 2.3.3). The data from this study indicates that these types of texts are still not being used in the formal reading curriculum. This recommendation does not suggest that boys should be excluded from reading extended fiction texts; rather that their preferred text types could be read in

the formal reading curriculum alongside the current range of fiction, poetry and non-fiction.

Secondly, in order for reading to have a high status amongst boys in the classroom, schools might encourage boys to share their knowledge with each other and become teachers in the classroom. These interactions are frequently confined to the playground or wet playtimes; for example, sharing statistical and biographical football facts, comparing facts on *Pokemon* or *Top Trump* cards. Reading in order to remember, share and compare facts with other boys might allow boys another way of regarding reading as a valuable and functional activity. This will contribute to the boys becoming self-motivated readers. One way in which all boys can be teachers might be for classes to be paired with younger classes. All boys could read with a more inexperienced reader, allowing them to be the experienced reader in the interaction. Being a teacher in this way will help boys feel knowledgeable about reading since they will have to articulate their own knowledge and understanding of reading, and this will develop their confidence.

All six of the young successful boy readers in this study are competitive readers. It would be interesting to explore ways in which this could be legitimised in the classroom. Many schools discourage competitiveness between children, preferring children to 'compete' against their own previous performance rather than against other children. Despite this, children know who are the successful and unsuccessful readers. It may be possible to find ways to legitimise this competitiveness in the classroom and make it work positively for all boys.

It would also be valuable for all boys to be encouraged to examine the gender assumptions on which texts and their own reading diets are based in order to move forwards in their reading development and broaden the range of texts they read. Despite their success as readers, the non-fiction reading of the six boys studied focused heavily on stereotypical masculine interest areas and the boys demonstrated stereotypical views on texts suitable for male and female readers (see section 6.1.2). One way to develop the reading of all boys, then, might be to help them recognise that their interests are socially and culturally influenced, to challenge their perceptions regarding masculine and feminine texts and to encourage them to broaden their own reading repertoires. It might be valuable, then, to talk explicitly with boys about reading and masculinity.

A number of theorists have suggested critical literacy as a way forward for all children (e.g. Davies 1997, Hall and Coles 1997, Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, Skelton 2001, Rowan et al 2002). Through critically examining texts and their own reading habits and preferences, children can be helped to recognise the following: that texts are based on assumptions from particular social and cultural contexts, including gender assumptions; that texts can have multiple meanings and can be interpreted from different positions; that individuals are constructed as readers by their social and cultural context; and that there are many possible ways of being a boy or a girl. Davies (1997), for example, believes that critical literacy can offer boys the possibility of recognising that masculinity can have multiple and diverse versions. All boys can be helped to recognise that there are many ways of being a boy (and a man). Through the examination of texts, boys can recognise that masculinity can be 'multiple and diverse, rather than unitary and oppositional to femininity' (1997:19),

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and that hegemonic versions of masculinity are not the only versions available to them. Marsh and Millard (2000) illustrate how young children can be introduced to such ideas through the use of popular culture in the classroom. Since popular culture frequently offers a restricted range of masculinities, traditionally hegemonic versions being dominant, 'it is important to provide opportunities for young children to deconstruct the gendered nature of this popular discourse' (2000:34). They illustrate classroom examples of work with young children which challenges hegemonic ideologies; for example, discussing the gendered nature of the superhero discourse, and asking children to consider non-violent ways in which superheroes could defeat baddies.

The above suggestions have all been targeted towards schools. However, the recommendations would be more effective if supported by a co-ordinated approach from local or central government. Schools need to be given support in order to initiate and manage change effectively.

Reflecting on this study, I recognise limitations which are present. In the methodology discussion, I said that I hoped the boys would be able to speak for themselves in the study. The data presented in the results contains less of the boys' voices than I had hoped. Generally, the boys' parents and teachers were able to illuminate the boys' reading more than the boys themselves. By the end of the study the boys were aged seven years, and whilst they were able to talk eloquently with me about the content of their reading, they were not able to reflect on the process. This was illustrated on my final visit to the boys when I asked them what they thought had made them good readers. Only two of the boys were able to answer this: Aidan said 'people teaching

me' and Timo said 'having nice books'. The other four boys were not able to suggest an answer. I have stayed in contact with the boys and their families and it is my intention to return to the boys when they are older. Minns (1999) studied the reading of children starting school and gained valuable additional data when she returned to talk to them when they were aged eleven, and then again when aged fifteen years. The boys in this study will be able to reflect on their reading in a more abstract manner at the end of their primary schooling and I hope to return to them at this age to undertake further research.

Another limitation is the data which I collected from schools. I focused my observations on reading in Literacy Hour lessons since I expected that this would be where most of the teaching of reading took place. However, it became apparent that much teaching of reading took place outside the Literacy Hour and, whilst I spoke to the teachers about this, I did not observe this teaching taking place; for example, paired reading in Barnaby and Joe's school, individual reading with an adult, the boys' own sustained reading.

The research carried out for this study raises other issues which could not be explored further due to the limitation on the size of this piece of research. Thus a number of research areas could be pursued in future studies. The first of these would be to examine a larger number of young successful boy readers and to identify patterns in their biographical details. Previous research has found that a number of family background factors influence achievement including, for example, socio-economic circumstance, level of parental education, position in family and the age of the child in relation to the year group. However, no patterns were evident in these factors in the

six boys studied. It would be interesting to see if this absence of pattern is maintained when a larger number of boys are studied. Another area for further research is the role of siblings in boys' reading development. It was suggested that siblings may act as role models for boys; however, data for this suggestion was extremely limited and it would be interesting to pursue this further. Given the limitation in the data I collected from schools, discussed above, I would like to collect further data from schools; specifically, to collect observational data on boys' reading outside the Literacy Hour. A final area for further investigation is the extent to which the work can be applied to girls. Not all girls achieve highly in reading and it would be interesting to explore the relationship between girls' reading achievement and the place of reading in girls' feminine identities. Understanding this relationship may help to raise the achievements of those girls who are currently underachieving in reading.

The recommendations to schools, discussed above, raise further areas for research. Ways in which schools can implement the suggestions made above need to be examined; for example, the most productive ways in which schools can educate parents to be effective teachers of reading at home, ways in which men can be involved in boys' reading in schools where there are a small number of male staff, and ways in which boys' competitiveness can be used constructively in the classroom.

I hope that this study makes a contribution to understanding boys' reading, particularly the relationship between masculinity and reading, since I would argue that there is a strong relationship between the place of reading in boys' masculine identity and their reading achievement. Previous literature has recognised that boys' underachievement is associated with the negative place of reading in boys' masculine

identity; that being a boy and being a reader are in opposition to each other. This study has shown that boys' high achievement is associated with reading having a positive place in boys' masculine identity; that being a boy and being a reader can be compatible. This work therefore challenges the deficit model of boys' reading which is currently prevalent in the literature and discussion on boys' reading (Hall and Coles 1997); that is, the assumption that boys' achievement in reading is low and is weaker than that of girls. If the reading achievements of boys are to be raised, teachers and educationalists must use their professional expertise to understand what makes boys good readers and ensure that a rich and diverse reading curriculum is in place that encourages boys to give reading a desirable place in their masculine identity.

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Appendix 1: Prompt sheet for initial conversation with parents

Prompt Questions for Home Visit One

Reassure parents that there are no right or wrong answers. Their child is a good reader and I am interested in why this is the case. If they never read with him and have no books in the house, this will provide interesting research data.

Ask whether they are happy for the conversation to be recorded.

Getting to know the family

Who lives in the family home? What are their relationships to each other?

Who is in the extended family? Do any extended family members play a significant part in the child's life?

Who in the family is the child particularly close to?

Conversation with parents

Did the mother have a straightforward pregnancy/birth?

Did the child have a normal development pattern? Were there any areas of development that were particularly early/late? Was he easy to feed? Did he sleep well?

At what age did he start say words? What were his first words?

At what age did he start to construct simple sentences?

When did he first have books? When was he first read to? Who looked at books with him? When did he first pick up books for himself? Did he enjoy looking at books?

Who buys the child books? Do the family belong to a library? Do they visit it regularly? Does the child ask for books?

Does the child have a regular reading time? What is read during this time? Who reads with the child during this time?

How would the parents describe the child's personality? What does the child enjoy doing? What are his hobbies/interests?

Observation of home environment

What reading materials are evident in the home?

What reading materials are evident in the child's bedroom/playroom?

Checklist: books, magazines, comics, newspapers, computer software/games, the Internet, pinboards, catalogues, maps, timetables, pictures on the wall, greetings cards.

Appendix 2: Prompt sheet for conversation with Year 1 teachers

Prompt Questions for School Visit One

Reassure teacher that there are no right or wrong answers. The prompts don't mean I think these things should be available. The child is a good reader and I am interested in why this is the case. If the child has had a limited reading experience at school, this would provide interesting research data.

Ask whether they are happy for the conversation to be recorded.

Conversation with teacher

What does the child read in school? What resources are available for reading? Scheme books? Others? Class/school library?

When does he read? What opportunities does the child have for reading outside reading/literacy lessons?

Who does he read to/with? How does the teacher 'hear the children read'? Does anyone else listen to children read?

Are the children read to? Do the children have an opportunity to look at books/read for pleasure? Do the children have the opportunity to share books with their peers? Is

there a whole school reading time? Does the school have a reading buddy (or similar) scheme?

When was the child first identified as a successful reader? Has any additional provision been made as a result of this?

Child's reading records

What do the child's reading record indicate about his reading? What do his records indicate about his abilities in other areas? What was his Baseline Assessment score in reading? In other areas? (Request copies)

School policy documents

Do any of the school policies/documentation mention provision for children with above average abilities in a curriculum area? (Request copies)

Observation of classroom/school environment

Does the classroom convey a positive message about reading? Is there an attractive, well-resourced book corner? Do display boards/captions encourage reading? What resources are evident for supporting reading?

Does the school convey a positive message about reading? Is reading encouraged through the school environment? Is there an attractive, well-resourced school library? Do display boards encourage reading?

Checklist: fiction books, non-fiction books, scheme books, 'boys' interest books, comics, IT resources, book cataloguing systems, furniture in book areas/libraries, displays about books/reading, captions to encourage reading.

Appendix 3: Classroom observation schedule

Observation Schedule

Name:

Date:

Learning objective(s) for lesson:

Shared Reading Observation: Book: Evaluation:
Word/Sentence Level Work Observation: Evaluation:

Teacher-led or Independent Activity
Observation:
Evaluation:

Plenary
Observation:
Evaluation:

Overall evaluation:

Teacher comment:

Appendix 4: Parent/child reading interaction observation schedule

Observation of parent/child reading interaction

Child: Date of birth:

Date of observation: Parent:

Nature of the activity, including title of book if applicable:

Observation:

Evaluation:

General comments:

Appendix 5: Prompt sheet for conversation with Year 2 teacher

Prompt Questions for School Visit Four

Conversation with teacher

How do you cater for the most able readers in the class (boys and girls)?

During shared reading? During guided reading?

Do you have differentiated learning objectives/targets for literacy?

Do the most able children have individual targets?

How do you ensure that the most able readers continue to develop their reading?

Do the children ever read individually? Do they engage in individual silent reading?

Do you cater specifically for the boys in any way?

Do you believe boys have different reading interests to girls?

Do you consider gender when choosing books for the children? For guided/individual

reading? For reading aloud to the class?

Research indicates that boys perceive literacy to be a feminine activity and one which

conflicts with their developing masculinity.

Do you feel that boys are happy being good readers (as opposed to being good at

something more traditionally masculine, e.g. football)?

Do boys talk about reading more than/less than/the same amount as the girls?

Research suggests that 'critical literacy' can offer a way forward for boys.

(Talking critically with children about their reading diet, e.g. reflecting on their reading histories and how they come to have the tastes they have.)

Do you talk to the children about their reading tastes?

Do you talk to children about how they make their reading choices and why they have certain preferences?

Do you ever talk explicitly with the children about reading and gender, e.g. how books are aimed at boys/girls, how these reflect cultural values (football stories 'masculine', school stories 'feminine').

Do you have any other comments to make about the focus boy's reading?

Appendix 6: Books shown to boys when discussing preferences

Blackman, Malorie (1997) *Space Race* London: Transworld Publishers Ltd.

Briggs, Raymond (1970) *Jim and the Beanstalk* London: Puffin Books

Browne, Anthony (2000) *My Dad* London: Transworld Publishers

Byford, Sally (2000) *Thunderbirds: Cry Wolf, Scott to the Rescue* London: Carlton Books Ltd.

Cole, Babette (1986) *Princess Smartypants* London: Puffin Books

Dahl, Roald (1980) *The Twits* Harmondsworth: Puffin Books

Edom, Helen, Katrak, Nicola and Meredith, Susan, (1998) *Starting Ballet* London: Usborne Publishing Ltd.

Foster, John (1996) *An Orange Poetry Paintbox* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Graham, Ian (1998) *My Best Book of Spaceships* London: Kingfisher Publications Plc

Ives, Penny (1996) *Millie and the Mermaid* London: Hamish Hamilton, Penguin Books

McKee, David (2000) *My First Elmer Joke Book* London: Random House Group Ltd.

McNaughton, Colin (1980) *Football Crazy* London: William Heinemann Ltd.

Lobb, Janice (2000) *Munch! Crunch! What's for Lunch?* London: Kingfisher Publications Plc

Royston, Angela (1992) *Minibeasts* London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.

Sowter, Nita (1998) *Maisie Middleton at the Wedding* London: Diamond Books

Appendix 7: Instructions to parents for completing the reading diaries

I would be very grateful if you could describe Aidan's reading in this diary once a week, listing the reading he has done during the week.

This could include any of the following, or anything else you think may be relevant:

- Reading school books
- Reading own books in bed before going to sleep
- Using a non-fiction book to find something out
- Buying and reading a comic
- Having a book for a present
- Visiting a library
- Using a guide book on a day out.

An example of an entry could be as follows:

Week ending 18th February

Aidan read the two school books which came home this week. We read books together before he went to sleep four or five times during the week. These were mostly story books. Yesterday he had a 'Bob the Builder' comic which he has been reading over the weekend. He also read the shopping list out to me while we were doing the weekly shopping and was reading the signs in the supermarket.

Please don't feel you have to write a large amount; notes will be fine and anything you do write will be of interest to me. Even if you have done no reading at all during the week, this will be interesting to me!

Appendix 8: Instructions to boys for completing the reading logs

Please could you make a
note of the title of anything
you read, for example, story
books, information books,
comics, programmes, guide
books, letters, information
on a computer screen.
You can include school and
home reading.
Please give each title marks
out of 10 for how much you
enjoyed reading it.
If you want to, you can make
a comment about it.

Appendix 9: Documents used to identify selection criteria

To achieve Level 1 of *The National Curriculum* children have to show the following:

Reading with accuracy, fluency and understanding

In his or her reading of the book, the child recognised familiar words. He or she used knowledge of letters and sound-symbol relationships in order to read words and to establish meaning when reading aloud. In these activities, he or she sometimes required support.

Understanding and response

Supported by the teacher's questions, the child responded to the book by identifying aspects he or she liked or found interesting.

To achieve Level 2c, they have to show the following:

Reading with accuracy, fluency and understanding

The child read more than 90 per cent of the passage independently and most of this reading was accurate. His or her use of strategies was sometimes inappropriate for the task, for example starting to sound out a familiar sight word. The child read from word to word and paused to talk about the text or to confirm meaning.

Understanding and response

The child commented on obvious characteristics, for example was able to recognise stereotyped good/bad characters (angel/wolf). Any retelling of the story may have been rather short or too long and heavily reliant on the illustrations.

(DfEE/QCA 1998:19)

To be an Emergent Reader from the *Individual Assessment of Children's Reading Development Throughout the Primary Years* children have to show the following:

Attitude and response to reading

S/he shows confidence and enthusiasm for books and reading in a variety of contexts.

*enjoys: being read to; shared reading; reading independently; choosing and browsing.

*is extending own list of favourite authors and titles; shows interest in information books.

*is beginning to develop a confident, 'problem-solving' approach to new text/unknown words.

*makes personal response to what is read, eg involved with characters, interested in facts.

*contributes to story-telling; to language games; to collective composition with adult scribe.

Reading behaviours and strategies

With very familiar text, and with *undemanding* new text, s/he is *beginning* to behave like an independent reader.

*becomes absorbed in a chosen book during time for independent and shared reading.

*reads familiar text aloud meaningfully, maintaining lively pace and appropriate intonation.

*can anticipate likely content of a new book using clues such as title, cover, pictures, print.

*can keep attention focussed on print and on the meaning of a text; when sharing books or reading to an adult, her/his conversation tends to be relevant to the context of the text.

When reading *more demanding text* with support, s/he is *beginning* to show evidence of using a *range of strategies* to try to reconstruct meaning.

*is listening to the overall sense of what s/he is reading, using this to anticipate the meaning of what comes next, and to make reasonable 'meaningful guesses' at unknown words.

*is using own knowledge of the commonest letter-sounds to tackle new words phonically, and to try to check whether own 'meaningful guess' fits phonically with what is written.

*is using own growing sight vocabulary of most common and personally significant words.

*is beginning to respond to the predictable flow of language, and to use the help of full stops.

*is beginning to realise, and to stop and check, when own reading has clearly not made sense.

<u>**Knowledge and understanding**</u>

S/he has a basic foundation of knowledge about books and how print works.

*knows well the books of a few favourite authors; has a few favourite information books.

*has experience of hearing read, and talking about, texts deriving from a range of cultures.

*is beginning to distinguish between factual and fiction texts, and to read them differently.

*shows beginnings of sight vocabulary and phonic knowledge in independent reading/writing.

*is beginning to understand and recognise some book conventions and presentational devices.

*understands and uses, mainly appropriately, book- and print-related terminology such as:

   - author, illustrator, character, beginning, middle and end of story, contents.

   - letter-name, letter-sound, capital letter, sentence, full stop, question/exclamation mark.

(Winchester/Birmingham LEA Assessment Unit 1995:no page numbers)

To achieve Level 2 of the *Primary Language Record* children have to show the following:

Becoming a reader: reading scale 1

Tackling known and predictable texts with growing confidence but still needing support with new and unfamiliar ones. Growing ability to predict meanings and develop strategies to check predictions against other cues such as the illustrations and the print itself.

(Barrs et al 1988:26)

Appendix 10: Books shared with the boys on the selection visit

Ahlberg, Janet and Allan (1980) *Funnybones*, London: Puffin Books

Ahlberg, Janet and Allan (1986) *The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters*, London: Heinemann

Blathwayt, Benedict (1999) *Faster, Faster, Little Red Train*, London: Red Fox

Butterworth, Nick (1992) *After the Storm*, London: HarperCollins

Foster, John (ed.) (1994) *A Red Poetry Paintbox*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

McKee, David (1994) *Elmer and Wilbur*, London: Red Fox

Murphy, Jill (1989) *A Piece of Cake*, London: Walker Books

Offen, Hilda (1992) *Nice Work, Little Wolf*, London: Puffin Books

Rosen, Michael (1993) *Nuts about Nuts*, London: HarperCollins

Ross, Tony (1987) *Stone Soup*, London: HarperCollins

Royston, Angela (1992) *Trains*, London: Dorling Kindersley

Waddell, Martin and Firth, Barbara (1991) *Let's Go Home, Little Bear*, London: Walker Books

Appendix 11: Letters and consent forms sent to headteachers and parents

Dear (Headteacher's name),

I am writing to you as one of the University of Birmingham, Westhill's partnership schools to see whether you would be interested in becoming involved in a research project into boys' reading. Given the current concern about the underachievement of boys in reading, I would like to work closely with successful boy readers in an attempt to identify factors which contribute to their success and to explore in detail the nature of the reading experience for this group of readers.

I am carrying out this research for a doctoral degree, but hope that your school would benefit from the project if you were able to become involved. Relevant findings would be shared with you during the course of the project. Please be assured that if your school were to become involved there would only be a small commitment required from the staff involved (class teachers) and this would largely entail informal conversations with myself once a term. I would also need to visit the school to carry out observations around once a term. Of course I shall provide you with more detailed information if your school is able to take part. If your school is able to take part, any information received will be treated as confidential and participants will be anonymous in the writing up of the project and in any publications which arise as a result of the project.

I would like to work with boys over a two year period, starting in September 2000 as the boys start Year 1 and following them until the end of Year 2 in July 2002. I would therefore be interested to hear from you if you have any boys currently in Reception classes who are particularly able readers; significantly above their peers and above where you would expect a child of that age to be, although they do not have to be 'gifted'. If you are willing to take part and you have a boy who may be suitable for inclusion in the project I would be very grateful if you would obtain parental consent for his name to be forwarded to me. I have enclosed a letter for the parents for this purpose. (If you have more than one boy who may be suitable, please photocopy the letter for the parents or contact me and I will supply you with additional copies.)

In the first instance please contact me by returning the attached form and the parental consent form to me at the University (address above). If you have any queries or would like to talk to me about the project I can be contacted personally in any of the following ways:
College number: 0121 472 7245
Mobile number: 07801 518688
E-mail: s.j.smith.1@bham.ac.uk
If you would like to meet me before making a decision about becoming involved in the project, please contact me and I will be very happy to come into school to talk

with you and any teachers who would be involved. I would also be happy for you to share this letter with the school Governors if you feel this is appropriate. On hearing from you I shall contact you with further details. If I don't hear from you in the next few weeks I may follow up this letter with a phone call to you which I hope will be acceptable.

I hope to hear from you.
Yours sincerely,

Susannah Smith
Senior Lecturer in Education

School: ....

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Headteacher: ....

We are interested in becoming involved in a research project into successful boy readers and have at least one boy who may be suitable for involvement in the study.

Signed: ....

5th June, 2000

Dear Parent/s,

I am a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Birmingham, Westhill and I am carrying out a research project into successful boy readers for a doctoral degree. There is currently a great deal of concern about the underachievement of boys in reading and I would like to work closely with successful boy readers in an attempt to identify factors which contribute to their success and to explore in detail the nature of the reading experience for this particular group of readers.

Your child has been identified by the school as a successful reader and therefore as one who may be suitable for inclusion in the study. At this stage I am asking for your permission to consider your son for inclusion in the project. Were you to become involved, I would follow your son's progress over two years, visiting him in school and at home once a term each. Of course I shall provide you with more detailed information if you are able to take part. If you do become involved, please be assured that any information received will be treated as confidential and all participants will be anonymous in the writing up of the project and in any publications which arise as a result of the project.

If you are happy for your child to be considered for the study please complete the attached consent form and return it to your child's teacher who will pass it on to me. Giving consent at this stage does not commit you to becoming involved. On receiving the form I shall contact you in the way requested and provide you with further details. If you have any queries or would like to talk to me about the project please contact me personally at the University (details above) or as follows:
Mobile number: 07801 518688
E-mail: s.j.smith.1@bham.ac.uk

Thank you for considering this matter.
Yours faithfully,

Susannah Smith
Senior Lecturer in Education

Child's name: ....

Child's school: ....

Parent's name/s: ....

I/We give consent for my/our son to be considered for inclusion in a research project into successful boy readers.

Signed: ....

Please indicate how you would like me to contact you further (e.g. address/telephone number/e-mail):

Thank you.

Appendix 12: Results of selection process

This appendix will provide evidence to show how each of the six boys met the selection criteria.

Aidan

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

Aidan said that he loves reading and that he enjoys story books and information books. He said that he particularly enjoys information books about animals. Aidan had a good knowledge of young children's literature; he was clearly familiar with many of the books I showed him and he could name other books in a series. For example, when he saw the Percy the park-keeper book, *After the Storm*, he told me that he had a Percy the park-keeper book called *The Badger's Bath*. Some of the books he had at home and some were in the classroom book corner.

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

Aidan chose *The Jolly Postman* and read the text of this largely independently. We fell into a pattern of him reading the text and me reading the letters. (The letters were much harder to read since they included features such as very formal language, non-standard English and deliberate spelling errors dependent on the fictitious author of the letter.)

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

Aidan recognised the fairy tales and nursery rhymes that were referred to in the story. This included, for example, the reference to the nursery rhyme 'Hey Diddle Diddle' in the final picture. He enjoyed the humour, for example, he knew that 'Once upon a

bicycle' was a play on 'Once upon a time'. He also repeated a number of times and laughed at the word 'Toodle-oo'.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

Aidan used word recognition, phonic knowledge and contextual understanding successfully. When asked how he knew the word 'guess', Aidan replied that he knew the sounds and that u was a 'silent u' (phonic knowledge). When asked how he knew the word 'giant', Aidan replied that he had learnt it since it had been in his Oxford Reading Tree books (word recognition).

- Eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Aidan's reply that he enjoyed information books about animals led to a discussion of the recent school visit to the West Midlands Safari Park. Aidan recalled animals he had seen and information about them.

Barnaby

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

Barnaby recognised many of the books I showed him. He responded enthusiastically to the selection of books, particularly the ones with which he was familiar. He recognised many of the books from the classroom book area and from his own books at home.

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

Barnaby chose to read *Faster, Faster, Little Red Train*. He was able to read the majority of the words independently.

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

Barnaby enjoyed the story. He related many of the events in the story to his own experiences.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

Barnaby used a range of strategies to decode words including word recognition, contextual understanding and phonic knowledge. He decoded many unknown words using phonic knowledge and he could do this quickly enough to maintain the fluency of the reading and the meaning of the text.

- Eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Barnaby was very talkative about his experiences. He told me about travelling on a train, visiting a castle, dressing up and playing knights with his sister and going to listen to a band. These topics were all related to the text and pictures in the book.

Harry

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

Harry showed great enthusiasm for reading. He knew that he was a good reader and got pleasure from this; he told me he was the best reader in the class and which level he was on. He showed me the school reading books, which were stored in the area we were in, and some of the books that he had read. He was familiar with many of the books that I showed him; he was able to tell me which books were in school.

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

Harry chose *Faster, Faster Little Red Train* and read this completely independently. The only words I gave him were the place names, such as Pebblecombe. He enjoyed

the challenge of reading and did not want to be helped by me. I stopped reading 'with' him as this was clearly irritating him; he would speed up to read the words before me!

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

Harry was interested in the story and the illustrations in the book. He kept checking back through the illustrations to find the characters on the train and to follow their progress through the story.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

Harry was able to decode words quickly and effectively. His particular strength seemed to be decoding words using patterns in words (graphic knowledge). He came across the word 'musician' which he attempted as 'music' and self-corrected to 'musician'.

- Eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Harry was very talkative during our time together; he would start to talk about something in the story then would extend this to his own experiences and talk at great length.

Jacob

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

Jacob was familiar with some of the books I showed him. He could tell me which books were in the classroom reading area. He could also identify books that had been read to him and characters that he was familiar with from the television (Percy the park-keeper and *Funnybones* characters).

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

Jacob chose to read *The Jolly Postman* and he could read the text of the book largely independently. Again, I read the letters in the book.

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

Jacob understood the pun 'Once upon a bicycle'; he said that most stories start 'once upon a time'. He also recognised many of the fairy tales and nursery rhymes referred to in the book and could predict who was being referred to before it was made explicit in the book, for example, the giant from *Jack and the Beanstalk.*

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

Jacob used word recognition, phonic knowledge and contextual understanding as his primary strategies. He was able to work out the majority of the words in the text using these strategies.

- Eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Jacob talked about the fairy tales and nursery rhymes referred to in the book. He also chatted about his family, particularly about the arrival of a new sibling in a few months – he wanted a brother to play football with him!

Joe

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

Joe recognised many of the books that I showed him, for example, he recognised *Elmer*. He also said that he had got the set of the Large family books at home (*A Piece of Cake*).

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

Joe chose to read *Funnybones*. He read quite slowly but he knew many of the words and worked out many more.

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

Joe said that he had seen *Funnybones* on the television. He was able to predict what was going to happen in places, for example, he knew that the dog was going to collapse into a pile of bones.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

Joe used phonic knowledge to identify the initial sounds of unknown words. He then used a combination of the initial sound, the picture cue and contextual understanding to decode words.

- Eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Joe tended to talk when I asked him particular questions rather than initiating talk himself. I put this down to him being shy, since once or twice he 'forgot' himself and chatted enthusiastically about his own experiences prompted by the book and by my questions.

Timo

- Expresses an interest in books and reading, and can talk about preferences and interests.

Timo said that he enjoys reading and that he regularly visits a library. He knew many of the books that I presented him with since he had borrowed them from the local library.

- Can read a picture book, chosen from a selection, largely independently.

Timo chose an information book, *Trains*. He was able to read this largely independently although, being an information book, it did contain more challenging vocabulary which I told him, such as electricity.

- Can talk about the story/information read, showing understanding and enjoyment.

Timo enjoyed talking about trains and had a lot of knowledge about them, for example, he told me that 'these trains are coupling' and that 'this engine needs a shunter to put it in the engine shed'.

- Can use, and talk about, a range of reading strategies.

Timo used a range of strategies to decode words. In addition to word recognition and contextual understanding, his phonic knowledge was good and he was clearly using this to tackle unknown words.

- Eager to talk about experiences and feelings, and able to articulate these clearly, as a personal response to what is read.

Timo told me that he had been in a passenger train in Europe and had been on 'Eurostar'. He also volunteered the information that his grandparents are German and that he writes to them. I asked him if he could speak German and he said no, although he did then say 'Meine namen ist Timo'.

Appendix 13: Biographies of the boys

Aidan (d.o.b. 19.3.95)

Aidan lives north of Birmingham, in Sutton Coldfield, with his mother, father and older sister. At the outset of the project, Aidan was aged 5.6 years and his sister was aged 7 years. The family is a close one and they see both sets of grandparents regularly. The maternal grandparents live locally and the children see them most days. The paternal grandparents live further away in the Northwest of England, but the children see them around once a month and talk to them regularly on the telephone. They also meet regularly with aunts, uncles and cousins.

Aidan's mother has recently returned to part-time work. She left school at 16 with 9 O-levels and 3 CSEs, and also attained RSA levels 1 and 2 in shorthand and typing. She worked full time in sales and marketing for travel and tour operators until she had children and has recently returned to part-time work in sales. This work is very flexible and she is able to change her days, for example, to attend school performances or if the children are unwell. Aidan's father works full-time. He left school at 18 with 3 A-levels and has subsequently attained professional marketing qualifications. He is national director of sales for a major travel operator based in Birmingham, and has responsibility for regional team managers. Before Aidan went to school his mother was at home with him full-time. Before starting school, Aidan attended a mother and toddler group, a playschool and then the nursery attached to the primary school.

Aidan lives in a well-presented, detached home on a suburban housing estate. Many children's games and activities are evident in the family living room; for example, lego models the children have made, Aidan's snooker table and art and craft activities in which the children are currently engaged. Resources for literacy activities are stored in Aidan's bedroom. He has his own bookcase which is well-stocked with fiction and non-fiction books appropriate to his age; as well as picture books, it contains more challenging novels and information texts. He has a desk in his bedroom with writing equipment on it. His bedroom is also well-stocked with games and activities. There is a family computer in an upstairs study and there is a range of children's software for this.

Whilst Aidan's mother and father both enjoy reading, Aidan is more likely to see his father reading. His father reads a newspaper, particularly at weekends, and reads books for work and for pleasure. His mother commented that she does not currently have time to read books, but she does enjoy reading newspapers and magazines. Aidan's sister also enjoys reading and spends time at home reading.

Aidan's mother recalls that he 'spoke quite early' and was talking in sentences between 2.0 and 2.6 years. At this age, he was able to join in with rhymes at the mother and toddler group they attended. The whole family used to talk to Aidan 'all the time'. Aidan's mother commented that he was his sister's 'buddy from the start' and that she had always chatted a lot to him. Whenever they go out, Aidan's mother talks to him and his sister about what they see. This includes reading signs in the environment, for example, road signs when they travel north to visit grandparents.

Reading resources have always been available to Aidan. He had bath books and fabric books as a baby, then board books, including dictionary-style ones with letters and words in them. Aidan's mother had tried to give these away recently but Aidan had objected to this since he still enjoys looking at them. Aidan's parents and grandparents buy him books as presents for his birthday and Christmas. In addition, he often has a book as a souvenir from a day out. Aidan has a comic about once a month. Recently, Aidan has started to use newspapers and teletext to read football match reports and league tables. Aidan has always been taken to a library, particularly before he started school. Once his older sister started school, Aidan and his mother would go to the library on their free days. Now he tends to use the school library instead and chooses books from there. Aidan spends time on the family computer and much of the software he uses involves reading on screen. Recently, he has started reading print around the home, for example, letters that come home from school and holiday brochures.

Family members have always read to Aidan. From being a toddler, he has had stories read to him every night. His father would attempt to get home from work in time to do this, and when his grandparents were staying both his grandmother and grandfather would read to him. Once his sister started school, she used to read her school book to her mother and Aidan, then once he started school he would read his book to his mother and her. Initially they had no words in them and they used to 'make up stories and talk about the pictures'. Then when he started reading books with words his mother recalls that he picked up reading very quickly. Aidan used to thoroughly enjoy reading his school books, feeling grown up like his sister and often remembering the books from when his sister had read them. His mother also remembers that he used to

get absorbed in the pictures, as though he was 'transformed in the story'. By the end of the project, Aidan was no longer having a story read to him every night for a number of reasons; he is often too tired by bedtime due to after-school activities, and his books are now considerably longer and he is able to read them to himself in his head.

Aidan's mother described him as sociable, fun-loving and energetic. He likes sport and, by the end of the project, played football and went swimming as out-of-school activities. He also goes to beavers which he enjoys. Aidan enjoys films and has seen various Disney films, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Lord of the Rings*. He also goes to the theatre and has seen *James and the Giant Peach*.

Barnaby (d.o.b. 23.6.95)

Barnaby lives in a Birmingham suburb about three miles from the city centre with his mother, father and two younger sisters. At the outset of the project, Barnaby was aged 5.3 years and his sisters were aged 3 and 2 years. The family is close to the maternal grandmother; although she lives in Kent they see her regularly, usually every school holiday. Both Barnaby's parents are teachers. They both have a BA in music and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) professional qualification. Barnaby's mother worked full-time until Barnaby was born and has subsequently worked part-time. Barnaby's father works full-time; he is a deputy headteacher and is currently undertaking the National Primary Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), the qualification required to become a headteacher.

At the beginning of the project, the family had recently moved to a traditional semi-detached style house. They immediately started to make improvements to the house, one of the first jobs being to decorate the children's bedroom and put up bookshelves in it. Most of Barnaby's literacy resources are stored in the bedroom which he shares with his sisters. They have a wide range of books which are treated with care and respect. They are encouraged to keep them tidy and they have some 'special' books which they look at with an adult (such as pop-up books which get torn easily). In the living room downstairs, Barnaby's parents' love of music is evident; there are shelves of tapes and CDs.

Barnaby's parents are both enthusiastic readers. As well as books, they read newspapers, magazines and CD guides. Reading is very much a whole family activity in Barnaby's household. When the children wake up in the morning they spend time reading to each other, taking it in turns to be 'teacher'. Barnaby likes putting on different voices when he reads to his sisters. On occasion the whole family read together; on a trip to the botanical gardens they all spent time sitting on the grass reading. In the evenings, Barnaby's mother or father reads to all the children in the bunkbeds in their bedroom; his father commented 'I just sit in the corner and they all peer over the top or they all snuggle round'. Barnaby's mother commented that she and his father enjoy the children's books as much as the children do.

Barnaby's parents remember his speech development as being 'average'. From around 10 months, Barnaby vocalised animal sounds, and from this words and then short phrases developed. He was referred to a speech therapist because his health visitor was concerned that his speech was unclear; however, the speech therapist was

unconcerned and this was not pursued. Barnaby's parents always talk with the children about what they see when they are out. His mother commented 'we wouldn't walk to school without noticing the weather and the trees and squirrels'. His father mentioned noticing different signs on the motorway on long journeys.

Barnaby has had books 'from the top, from the word go'; one of the first things he held was a fold-out book and he had lots of first books. He gets books from a variety of sources; he has them for Christmas and birthday presents and he buys them from a book club. As well as story books, Barnaby has information books on subjects that interest him, such as castles and dinosaurs, and he has railway magazines. Until the family moved they went to the library regularly and Barnaby would choose books for himself and for his sisters. Barnaby's father commented that books 'are just around' in the home. Barnaby has a comic around once a month. The family has a computer with children's software on it, and Barnaby practises his school spellings on the computer.

Both parents have always read with Barnaby. His father also enjoys retelling stories orally to the children. Until recently, Barnaby used to read his school reading book to his mother every day. Despite being teachers, Barnaby's parents did not make any attempt to teach him to read before he went to school; they wanted him to learn at school with the other children. Their priority is that he experiences a breadth of reading opportunities and they are far more concerned with his enjoyment and comprehension of texts, than with pushing him forwards. When they read story books, they often stop and look up relevant topics in information books; for example, when Barnaby had a story called *Roman Adventure* as his school reading book, they spent

the week finding out about the Romans, including finding Rome in an atlas and comparing ancient and modern Rome. They also re-tell the endings of stories, making them more interesting. More recently, Barnaby's parents have become more relaxed about feeling they need to read with him every day; he now reads in his head in bed every evening.

Barnaby's parents report that he can be confident and helpful, but on occasions he is shy and unsure of himself. They also believe that he doesn't always push himself, just doing enough work at school to 'get by', but no more. He is, however, good at asking questions and is interested in lots of things, including space and steam trains. He has seen the *Thomas and the Magic Railroad* film. He also enjoys helping his father cook, and playing chess with him. Barnaby enjoys a number of out-of-school activities, including swimming, football and beavers.

Harry (d.o.b. 23.3.95)

Harry lives in a suburb of Birmingham, about six miles from the city centre, with his mother, father and younger sister. At the outset of the project, Harry was aged 5.6 years and his sister was aged 2 years. The family is close to the paternal grandmother; she lives locally and frequently helps with childcare. Harry's parents both work full-time. His mother left school at 17 with 'a few' CSEs (including a grade 1 for English literature and a grade 2 for English language) and subsequently attained professional qualifications in typing, shorthand and office practice. She works as a legal secretary. Harry's father also left school at 16 and went to art college. He works as a close-circuit TV service engineer, having taught himself the skills required for this. Since both parents worked, Harry attended a private nursery full-time before starting school.

Many literacy opportunities are evident in Harry's home. In the main living room, where I spent time with Harry during my visits to his home, there is a bookcase containing Harry's parents' books and the children's videos. The books most evident are his father's large, hardback books, for example, those on military history. The videos are largely those aimed at pre-school children, for example, *Barney* and *Rosie and Jim*. A large plastic box behind the settee contains the children's books, mostly fiction and non-fiction picture books suitable for Harry and his 2 year old sister. There is a comic rack which contains catalogues and newspapers, including a regular tabloid newspaper. Finally, a cupboard near to the dining table contains writing materials and activities, including pens, paper and the children's comics.

Harry's mother and father are both avid readers. His mother usually reads fiction books on the train to and from work, in bed and on holiday. She commented that she always has a book in her bag and that Harry knows she likes reading. Harry's father reads non-fiction books and is particularly interested in military history books. Harry often sits on his father's lap and looks at these books with him. Both parents read English literature classics for pleasure. Harry's father has an interest in modern languages and has taught himself Spanish and Greek. He drops words and phrases into conversation at home so Harry is familiar with some words from these languages.

Harry was an early talker; from 18 months he started putting words together and by 2.0 years he was talking in sentences. His mother remembers having conversations and arguments with him at 2.0 years, and commented that from 2.6 years he had been 'a chatterbox', even talking to himself or his toys when lying in bed at night. By the

time he was 2.0 years, Harry could recite the alphabet. His parents had taught it to him by singing an alphabet song with him. Harry's mother and father had always talked to him continually, and had used adult language and vocabulary, rather than 'baby talk', with him; for example, they used the words 'dog' and 'cat', rather than 'bow wow' and 'pussy cat'. Harry has been interested in environmental print since he was at nursery school, and his mother noted that on a family holiday to Cornwall he continually read signs on the roads and in shops.

Harry has a large number of his own books. His mother bought him his first books 'before he was even born'. His parents buy him books for presents and encourage other people to do the same. Subsequently, Harry has many books in his home, in the box in the living room and in his bedroom. Harry also has a comic 'most weeks'. His parents believe this is valuable because they have stories and educational activities in them. The family buys a tabloid newspaper on a regular basis and, by the end of the project, Harry would read this to find out what was on television and to read reports of Manchester United football matches. There is no family computer in the home, but Harry's father often brings a laptop home from work and Harry is allowed to use this. Although there is no children's software on the computer, Harry plays the solitaire and pinball games and uses the Word software for writing. During the course of the project the family joined the local library and became regular users of this.

Harry's mother reported that he has always been interested in books and comics and that she and his father have always looked at these with him. She believes they did this 'automatically' because they both liked reading; they made it 'part of play'. From 'very early on' they looked at alphabet and number books with him, and books with

no words where he was encouraged to talk about the pictures and tell the story himself. Throughout the project they read his school reading book and other reading materials with him every night. His mother feels it is important to support the school reading in this way since there are so many children in his class.

Harry's mother described him as very out-going and strong willed. He enjoys reading, building things with bricks and playing games; his parents play frustration, pairs and Junior Scrabble with him. Harry enjoys going to the cinema and he goes to see a children's film most school holidays; films he has seen include *Dinosaur* and *Ice Age*. He has also been to the theatre; plays he has seen include *Beauty and the Beast*. He has recently started going to football training twice a week and he is very enthusiastic about this.

Jacob (d.o.b. 18.8.95)

Jacob lives with his mother, father and younger brother in a suburb of Birmingham about four miles from the city centre. At the beginning of the project, Jacob was aged 5.1 years and his mother had just had another baby who was two months old. Jacob is close to his maternal grandparents; although they do not live locally, he goes and stays with them for weekends. Jacob has an aunt who lives in Australia and during the project he went out to visit her and her family with his grandmother, mother and brother. Jacob's mother left school when she was sixteen with a few CSEs and started work as an office junior. She then worked in an accounts office for six years. When Jacob was younger she had a part-time cleaning job, and she currently has a part-time job distributing leaflets. Jacob's father works full-time as a window fitter. He left school at sixteen with a few CSEs and went to do an apprenticeship with Rover. Since

then he has worked in computing, set up a video hire business, and taught himself the skills needed to become a window fitter. The year before he started school, Jacob went to an LEA nursery school in the mornings.

In the living room of Jacob's house there are many literacy opportunities. He has a little table and chair, and a cupboard in a sideboard is filled with drawing and craft equipment, including paper, pens, scissors, and glue. Jacob loves making things and spends a lot of time sitting at his table doing this. There are some books in the living room, although most of his books are stored in his bedroom. Towards the end of the project the family bought a new computer and this is set up in the living room.

Whilst both parents enjoy reading, neither of them feel that they have time to do this at the moment. Jacob's mother has two young children to look after, and his father works long hours. Jacob's father has excellent general knowledge; he is interested in lots of things and is good at remembering facts – he is very good at pub quizzes!

Jacob's early language development was advanced. He started copying noises at twelve weeks and by eighteen months he knew the names of all his family, could imitate animal noises, join in with songs, and had a vocabulary of around forty words. Jacob's mother deliberately stopped giving him a dummy before he was twelve months old and she commented that he babbled all the time and 'never shut up'. She added 'I've always talked to him because I talk a lot myself'; she talks to him about where they are going and what they are doing. Jacob's grandmother loves having him to stay and says that she can talk to him like an adult. Jacob has always been

interested in print in the environment; he reads signs and adverts when they are out, and reads print in shops.

Jacob has always had books bought for him and he has a range of story and information books in his bedroom. He also brings story and information books home from the school library. He sometimes has a comic and usually chooses ones that tell him how to make or do things, for example, *Art Attack* and *Fun to Learn*. He also enjoys doing the puzzles in these. When he was younger, Jacob used to go to the library with his mother and grandmother; his mother still takes him and she reported that he 'nags to go'.

Jacob's mother has always read to him; she has read to him 'all the time' since he was around nine months old. He used to enjoy looking at 'first words' books; he would point to the pictures and say the words. His father used to read to him as well, but now he works longer hours and is at home less; he does read Jacob a bedtime story if he is at home at bedtime. More recently, Jacob prefers to read to himself, and he does this a lot, including when he wakes up in the morning. He also reads the newspaper if there is one in the house. Jacob reads baby books to his younger brother. Since Jacob started school, his parents have always supported the reading that was sent home. His mother remembers that in his Reception year, he was the first child in the class to know all of the words, and more recently he was the first in the class to move from the graded scheme books to choosing library books. Jacob enjoys spending time on the computer; he uses the new computer confidently, including writing e-mails to his cousin in Australia.

Jacob's mother describes his personality as outgoing; he was shy and sensitive when he was younger, but is no longer like this. He is artistic and enjoys making things; he often makes things he has seen on the television and in comics. He loves being taken out to places; his grandparents often take him out when he stays with them, for example, to Ludlow Castle. His most recent interest is football.

Joe (d.o.b. 25.9.94)

Joe lives with his parents and siblings in a suburb around three miles from Birmingham city centre. He has an older brother and a younger sister. At the beginning of the project, Joe was aged 5.11 years, his brother aged 7 years, and his sister aged 3 years. None of the extended family lives locally so Joe only tends to see them in the school holidays. On my final visit to the family, they had an additional member; a much-loved Labrador puppy! Joe's mother is a nurse. She left school with 4 A-levels, completed a BSc in biology and then took professional nursing qualifications (RGN). She stopped working when she had children and, after completing a re-training programme, has recently returned to part-time work. Joe's father is a doctor. After completing his A-levels he took a medical degree and has subsequently been awarded a PhD. He works full-time as a consultant rheumatologist in a Birmingham hospital, and has also lectured part-time at the medical school in Birmingham. Joe went to playgroup every morning, then attended an LEA nursery on a full-time basis the year before he started school.

At the beginning of the project Joe and his family moved house. (This did not involve a change of school.) They live in a large Victorian semi-detached house. There is a playroom for the children downstairs and room for the children to have their own

bedrooms upstairs, although Joe and his brother currently choose to share a bedroom. Their playroom is filled with toys, games, art and craft activities, books, and writing materials. The children spend a lot of time making things and many of these are displayed around the room, for example, plaster of paris Mr Men models, *Hama* bead models and a 3D planet model. There is a basket of scrap paper and the children have made little books using this; Joe has made books about France and Germany because he has been to France and is going to Germany. The playroom also includes a *Playstation* games console, and Joe has a *Gameboy* games console. Joe's bedroom has additional toys and a bookcase where most of his books are stored. The family has a computer, with a large quantity of children's software available, and a *Sega* games console in a spare bedroom.

Joe's parents are both keen readers. His mother enjoys reading novels. Whilst his father also enjoys this, he only has time to read fiction books on holiday since he has a large amount of reading to do for work. Both parents read a newspaper, which they have weekly, and medical texts, including books and professional journals. Reading is very much a whole family activity, particularly in the evenings. Joe's father makes an effort to get home from work in time to read to the children, and talk with them about what they have been doing during the day. Joe's mother and father both read to the children, and there are often different combinations of the family reading together on different nights. The children often spend time reading with each other; after they have gone to bed, they will often look at books together. They also spend time drawing and colouring at the desk in their bedroom after they have gone to bed.

Joe's mother remembers his speech development as being 'average'. She remembers that he was saying words before his second birthday, when his younger sister was born. Joe can be quiet and shy with people he does not know, and would not be described as a 'chatterbox'. The family have days out, for example, at Warwick Castle and Legoland, and when they are out they talk about the things they see and Joe enjoys reading the signs and print in the environment.

Joe has always had access to a large number of books. He has a range of story books and information books in his bedroom. Information books include those about the body, animals, dinosaurs, and kings and queens. He also enjoys joke books. His maternal grandmother particularly buys him books for birthday and Christmas presents. He has a comic occasionally and often chooses ones which show how to make things, for example, *Art Attack*. Joe's mother regularly takes the children to the local library. She also buys literacy and numeracy activity books and does these with Joe which he very much enjoys.

Books have always been read to Joe. His mother remembers reading to his older brother whilst feeding Joe as a baby; she commented that 'because we were always reading to (*older brother*) then Joe would naturally just be there and listen.' Joe has always enjoyed having stories read to him, and his parents read to him and his siblings every day at bedtime. Many of the activities and games that Joe enjoys involve him reading, for example, reading recipes when cooking, reading instructions for making things, and playing *Top Trumps* games. Joe uses the family computer for reading; his father helped him to find information about animals and insects, and he has visited the *Harry Potter* website. Joe's parents support his school reading; Joe reads his school

book most nights to one of his parents before he goes to bed. More recently the books have become longer and he may read them over a few nights

Joe's mother describes his personality as 'laid back' and 'studious'. He is eager to learn and will persevere until he gets things right. He enjoys drawing and colouring, and making things, and is good at constructing small, fiddly things. He loves animals and has two guinea pigs, as well as the new family dog. Joe has been to the cinema; films he has seen include *Monsters Inc.* and *Star Wars*. Out of school, Joe has swimming and tennis lessons, and goes to cubs.

Timo (d.o.b. 2.9.94)

Timo lives with his mother, father and two younger brothers in a Birmingham suburb about six miles from the city centre. At the outset of the project, Timo was aged 5.11 years and had a younger brother aged 2 years. During the first year of the project his mother had another baby boy. Timo's paternal grandparents live locally and he sees them regularly; they often babysit for him and his brothers. He also has aunts, uncles and cousins on this side of the family, and they meet regularly for family parties. Timo's mother is German and her family all live in Germany. Timo sees his maternal grandparents 2-3 times a year, flying to Germany for visits, sometimes on his own. His grandparents speak little English and Timo speaks to them in German. Although his German is not fluent, he is able to converse with family members.

Timo's mother is a qualified social worker. In Germany she initially left school and worked as a bank clerk, then she returned to higher education and trained to be a social worker. Her professional qualification is recognised in the UK and since having

children she has returned to part-time work. She enjoys working, but ensures that the children's routine is not disrupted and that a 'steady environment and some calmness' is maintained at home. Timo's father has a BSc in civil engineering. He initially worked as a lorry and coach driver, then he moved into computing. He currently works full-time as a computer programmer and has attained further computer qualifications. When his mother returned to part-time work, Timo was eight months old and was looked after by a family member until he was aged two, then he started attending a private day nursery.

Timo's home is a large, detached house in a cul-de-sac. There is an open-plan kitchen/dining room and the dining area is filled with toys, activities and games. This includes books and writing materials. Timo has his own bedroom and this contains a bookcase and a desk. His bookcase is filled with fiction and non-fiction books, books in English and German, and his current library books. His desk has paper and writing equipment in it. Timo is restricted in the amount of television he is allowed to watch, although he does watch programmes in German to develop his German language skills. There is no family computer; Timo's father works with computers and does not want one at home, and his parents do not want Timo spending large amounts of time playing computer games. They are aware that the children will need to develop ICT skills and they expect to buy a computer in the future.

Timo was an early talker, and was able to talk using sentences between 2.0 and 2.6 years. His parents emphasised that they always encouraged Timo to pronounce words accurately, for example, saying 'the' not 'de'. They used to play oral word games with him to encourage this. They always spoke to him 'normally' rather than in 'baby talk'.

believing that it would be more helpful to teach standard vocabulary from the beginning. Timo's father commented that 'when we go around anywhere we try to be observers'; they talk with Timo about what he can see. Timo's mother reported that they have always encouraged him to see the practical value of reading. They point out print in the environment, particularly road signs, and he now reads this himself and map-reads for the family. When he reads labels when they are out, they point out to him that he wouldn't have known this information if he had not been able to read.

Timo has had books since he was a baby. At six months he had fabric and board books, and books with just pictures in them. He has always had books in German, as well as English, since his German relatives send these to him. Timo's father commented that books were 'just sort of around'. Timo has books for presents and his family try to pick up on his interests, for example, his grandmother bought him a book about space. He also buys himself books with his own money. Timo has a comic occasionally, for example, if they are going on holiday, and he sometimes reads the pull-out comic section from the Sunday paper. He has recently started reading the sports section in newspapers. Timo has been taken to a library regularly; his mother does not use the local one, but one slightly further away which she believes to be better stocked. Until the birth of his younger brother, they visited the library around once a month and chose books and tapes to borrow. Timo reads leaflets from places he has visited, and letters and information that he brings home from school and from his football club.

Timo's parents have early memories of reading picture books with Timo. They remember looking at books with no words and talking about the pictures or 'making

up stories looking at the pictures', and that he always had favourite books. Reading is part of the daily evening routine; once Timo is in bed, one of his parents, usually his father, reads stories to him. On occasion his father reads to him in English, then his mother reads to him in German. Timo's father has been told that his father used to read to him, and Timo's grandfather now reads to him. By the end of the project his parents were no longer reading to Timo every night because he reads to himself in his head, although his mother does still read German books to him. Timo's parents have always read his school book with him and they tend to do this, and any other homework, at the weekend, feeling that he is too tired to read when he gets in from school during the week.

Timo's parents describe him as lively and outgoing. He likes to be outside playing on his bike and he enjoys sport. He is interested in construction and technical things; how they are made and how they work. He makes his own models with construction equipment and has lego, Knex and mechano in his bedroom. Towards the end of the project, Timo has joined a football club which trains once a week and plays in an under 7s league.

Appendix 14: Categories for analysis of the home data

Early language development and parents talking to/with the boys

Interest in environmental print

Resources available in the home

Library usage

Parents reading to the boys

Parents listening to the boys' reading

Parents' own reading

Whole family reading together, including siblings

Fathers'/grandfathers' involvement

Boys' enjoyment of reading

Boys' success at reading

Parental involvement in school reading

Appendix 15: Categories for analysis of the school data

School policy guidance on teaching successful boy readers

School offering professional expertise: suitable texts, knowledge of progression

Content of school reading curriculum

Boys' involvement in the Literacy Hour: shared reading, guided reading

Differentiation

Use of targeted questioning

Individual reading

Sustained reading

Critical literacy

Boys' competitiveness

Boys as self-motivated learners

Boys teaching themselves lessons about reading

Boys' enjoyment of school reading

Boys' success at school reading

Boys as teachers in the classroom: modelling and scaffolding other children's reading

Influence of peers