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‘Once my mam and dad have gone out of my room when it’s bedtime, I unlock my duvet cover on my bed, and I get inside and read’.

Listening to Young Children’s Voices: Researching Children’s Experiences of Reading for Pleasure.



(Tan, 2001)

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PHD Thesis 2022

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on the 9th of April 2018, ethics reference no 2432.

I declare that the Word Count of this thesis is 84, 909

Name; Linda Graham

Date: 1st September 2022



Publications and Conference Presentations arising from this Thesis.

Conference Presentations

'Once my mam and dad have gone out of my room when it's bedtime, I unlock my duvet cover on my bed and I get inside and read (age 5):' Exploring Reading Spaces: Children's Perspectives. The British Association for Early Childhood Education Annual Conference. 'Emotional Wellbeing in Early Years – Perspectives from Research and Practice' March 2021.

'Once my mam and dad have gone out of my room when it's bedtime, I unlock my duvet cover on my bed and I get inside and read (age 5):' Listening to Young Children's Voices: An Ethnographic Study of Children's Experiences of Reading for Pleasure. The British Association for Early Childhood Education. Darlington Branch Conference. May 2022.

University of Sunderland Public Lecture Series 2022/23 *'Once my mam and dad have gone out of my room when it's bedtime, I unlock my duvet cover on my bed and I get inside and read'*: Listening to Young Children's Voices: An Ethnographic Study of Children's Experiences of Reading for Pleasure by Linda Graham.

Future Projects

For the Love of Books: Developing Children's Storytelling. Masters level CPD University of Sunderland currently being developed with a predicted start date January 2023.

Working with a number of primary schools about reading for pleasure and children's authorship.

Research Project Bid

Story Bridges Sunderland Project Bid (2021)

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures	12
List of Abbreviations	14
Abstract.....	15
Chapter One: Introducing the Study	17
1.1 Educational Research.....	17
1.1.1 What I wanted to study.	18
1.2 Research Aims and Objectives	19
1.3 Disciplinary Background	20
1.4 Personal Rationale	22
1.5 Research Context	23
1.5.1 Introducing the Project.....	24
1.5.2 The Classroom	25
1.6 Key Influences	25
1.6.1 Tell Me: Children, Reading, and Talk	26
1.6.2 How Texts Teach What Readers Learn	26
1.6.3 Barthes and the golden thread.	28
1.7 Outline of the Thesis.....	28
1.7.1 The Literature Review.....	28
1.7.2 Methodology Chapter Overview	29
1.7.3 Findings & Discussion: What we saw, made and found along the way... ..	30
1.7.4 A Compelling Tale: Contribution to Theory, Conclusions and Recommendations Overview	
30	

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	33
2.1 Theoretical Framework	33
2.2 Childhood Studies Discourse	35
2.2.1 Sociology of Childhood	38
2.2.2 The Social Construction of Childhood: Constructions Relevant to this Study	41
2.2.3 Childhood: How Rights Based Discourses May Influence Work with Children	47
2.2.4 Childhood Participation & Engagement	49
2.2.5 Meaning of Children’s Participation	50
2.2.6 Childhood: Concepts of Agency, Voice & Power	53
2.3 Children’s Literature	55
2.3.1 Historical Perspectives on Children’s Books	57
2.3.2 Books Designed for Children	58
2.3.3 Picturebooks	59
2.3.4 Readerly Texts	61
2.3.5 Writerly Texts	62
2.4 Education, Children’s Literature, and Reading Discourses	64
2.4.1 Literacies and the Social	65
2.4.2 Reading: Education, Policy, and Schooling	67
2.4.3 Statutory Governance of Reading	68
2.4.4 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	70
2.4.5 Reading Instruction: The Standards Agenda	73
2.4.6 Reading Schemes	74
2.4.7 Reading for Pleasure: The Wider Reading Agenda	74
2.4.8 Reading for Pleasure	75
2.4.9 A Subtle Balance	77
2.5 Children’s Geographies and Reading Spaces	79
2.5.1 Space, Power, and the Regulation of Childhood	81

2.5.2	Reading Environments.....	82
2.6	In conclusion.....	84
Chapter Three: Methodology		87
3.1	Introduction.....	87
3.2	Researching Childhood: Then and Now	88
3.3	Research Paradigms	89
3.4	Research Approach	92
3.5	Research Context & Participatory Phase Sampling.....	95
3.6	Ethnographic Perspectives & Strategies	97
3.6.1	Ethnographic Perspectives: Ethnographic Studies <i>of</i> Education.....	99
3.6.2	Ethnographic Perspectives: Ethnographic Studies <i>in</i> Education’	99
3.6.3	Observations and Fieldnotes	100
3.6.4	Cultures of Communication.....	101
3.6.5	Classroom Book Collection	102
3.6.6	Holiday Reading Audit	103
3.7	Ethnographically Inflected Participatory Research	103
3.7.1	Disturbing the Field	104
3.7.2	Object Elicitation	104
3.7.3	Literacy Events & Storytelling	105
3.7.4	Picturebooks as Object Elicitation.....	105
3.7.5	Scrapbooking	106
3.7.6	Construction of the Scrapbooks	107
3.7.7	Scrapbooks and Child Conferencing	108
3.7.8	Barthes Revisited.....	109
3.7.9	Semi-structured Interviews	110
3.8	Ethical Considerations	111
3.8.1	Reflexivity of ‘self’	113

3.8.2	Complexities inherent in ethical researching with young children.....	114
3.8.3	Ethical Symmetry.....	115
3.8.4	Research Transparency & Consent.....	116
3.8.5	Informed Consent.....	116
3.8.6	Assent Conversations.....	117
3.8.7	Confidentiality & Anonymity	118
3.9	Research Validity/Credibility	118
3.10	Data Analysis	121
3.10.1	Data Analysis: An Epistemological Framework.....	121
3.11	Data Analysis Process.....	123
3.11.1	Thematic Analysis: Reporting and Analysing Patterns	123
3.11.2	Analysis Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data	124
3.11.2.1	Visual and Written Data: Children’s Drawings and Stories in their Scrapbooks	124
3.11.2.2	Audit Data: Classroom Book Collection & Holiday Reading Audits	125
3.11.3	Analysis Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes.....	125
3.11.4	Analysis Phase 3: Searching for Themes.....	126
3.11.5	Analysis Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	126
3.11.6	Analysis Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes.....	127
3.11.7	Analysis Phase 6: Producing the Report.....	127
Chapter Four:	The Children’s Stories (...and some from adults).....	129
4.0	Chapter Structure	132
4.0.1	Section One.....	133
4.0.2	Section Two	133
4.0.3	Section Three	134
4.0.4	Baseline Data Research.....	134
4.0.5	The Origins of the Classroom Book Collection.....	137

Section One: Theme 1.....	139
4.1 Children’s Choices, Agency & Autonomy	139
4.1.1 Much Loved Books: Reading Choices	141
4.1.2 Early Recollections	142
4.1.3 Current Favourites	143
4.1.4 Practitioner’s Much-Loved Books	146
4.1.5 Practitioners’ Perspectives of Children’s Choices	147
4.1.6 Favourite Characters	148
4.1.7 Traditional Tales and Fairy Tales	153
4.1.8 Summary: The Importance of the Children’s ‘Mirrors and Windows’	156
Section One: Theme 2.....	159
4.2 The Power of the Page: Discourses of Reading.....	159
4.2.1 Braids of Literacy	160
4.2.2 Talking about Reading Literature	161
4.2.3 Empathic Readings	165
4.2.4 Intertextuality.....	165
4.2.5 Meta Literacy	166
4.2.6 Summary.....	167
Section One: Theme 3.....	170
4.3 Schooling Literacy: The <i>Letter</i> of Reading	170
4.3.1 Reading Instruction in the Classroom.....	170
4.3.2 Competition: A Backwash Effect	173
4.3.3 Summary.....	176
Section Two: Theme 4.....	177
4.4 The Child & the Reading Environment	177
4.4.1 Children’s Environmental Literacy.....	178
4.4.2 <i>Cinderella’s Carriage</i> : Reading Spaces in the Classroom	179

4.4.3	Practitioner’s Perspectives on Classroom Reading Spaces	183
4.4.4	Reading Spaces at Home	188
4.4.5	Children Designed Reading Spaces & Materiality	191
4.4.6	Finding Silence at Home.....	193
4.4.7	A Quest for Silence at School: Reading Choices and Practices	194
Section Three: Theme 5		197
4.5	Communities of Readers: Sharing Stories	197
4.5.1	Children as Storytellers.....	198
4.5.2	Reading as Community.....	200
4.5.3	Practitioner Perspectives on Storytelling	202
4.5.4	Children as Storytellers.....	205
4.5.5	Becoming an ‘ <i>Author</i> ’.....	207
Phase 1: Storytelling - Whole Group Literacy Event.....		208
Phase 2: Developing the Story - Writing Group		208
Phase 3: Developing the Visual Storyline - Whole Group Literacy Event		209
Phase 4: Creating the Imagery - Photography Group.....		210
Phase 5: Handwriting the Story (Whole Group Activity)		211
Phase 6: Editing and Formatting - Editing Group.....		212
4.5.6	Reflections on the Process	212

4.6	Chapter Summary: The <i>Spirit</i> and the <i>Letter</i> of Reading	214
	Chapter Five: A Compelling Tale.....	218
5.1	Summary of findings and responding to the research aims and objectives.	218
5.2	The Reading Spaces Framework	224
5.3	Physical Reading Spaces: The Outer Circle	226
5.4	Functional Spaces	228
5.5	Textual Spaces	230
5.6	Metacognitive Spaces	231
5.7	Emotional Spaces.....	232
5.8	Imaginative Spaces	233
5.9	In summary... ..	233
5.10	Redressing the Balance: Implications for Educational Practice	234
5.10.1	Blurred Spaces	235
5.10.2	Constructs of Readers	236
5.11	Research Recommendations	237
5.11.1	Physical Spaces/‘Setting’	237
5.11.2	Literacy Events	238
5.11.3	Classroom and Home Book Collections.....	238
5.11.4	Teachers as Readers.....	238
5.12	Reflections & Implications for Further Research	239
	Reference List	241
	Appendix One: Parent Questionnaire	266
	Appendix Two: Children Information Sheet	268
	Appendix Three: Parent Information Sheet	271
	Appendix Four: Professional Information Sheet	273

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Research Theoretical Framework.....	22
Figure 2. Constructs of Childhood (Mills, 2003:9).....	43
Figure 3. Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992)	51
Figure 4 Pathways to Participation (Shier, 2001)	52
Figure 5. Openings, Opportunities & Obligations (Shier, 2001:110).....	52
Figure 6. Social View of Literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8).....	66
Figure 7 The Subtle Balance. Cremin (2011)	72
Figure 8. Serafini's 'Hills'	78
Figure 9. Philosophical Grounding	90
Figure 10. Methodological Framework	95
Figure 11. Research Participants.....	97
Figure 12. Scrapbook Covers.....	108
Figure 13. Research Methods	111
Figure 14. Types of Research Data.....	122
Figure 15. Chapter and Scrapbook Structure	129
Figure 16. The Reading Circle (Chambers, 1991).....	130
Figure 17. Research Themes.....	132
Figure 18. Research Findings: The Children's Stories.....	133
Figure 19. Classroom Book Collection & School Holiday Audit	137
Figure 20. Sample of Images Representing Story Themes.....	141
Figure 21. Child 2 (age 5) The Three Bears	143
Figure 22. Child 1 (age 5) We're Going on a Bear Hunt	144
Figure 23. Child 5 (age 5) Goldyeelox and the Three Bears	144
Figure 24. Child 3 (age 5) Using Picturebook covers to illustrate favourite books: Dear Zoo, Elmer, The Tiger who came to Tea	144
Figure 25. Child 4 (age 5). Using Picturebook covers to illustrate favourite books: Dear Zoo, The Tiger who came to Tea	145
Figure 26. Child 14 (age 5) The Very Hungry Caterpillar	145
Figure 27. Child 12 (age 5) Dear Zoo.....	145
Figure 28. Child 5 (age 5) The Three Bears	149
Figure 29. Child 6 (age 5) Goldilocks	149
Figure 30. Child 7 (age 5) Goldilocks	149
Figure 31. Child 8 (age 5) The Witch from Room on the Broom	150
Figure 32. Child 9 (age 4) Little Red Riding Hood	150
Figure 33. Child 10 (age 4) Paperman	150
Figure 34. Child 12 (age 5) Goldilocks	151

Figure 35. Child 14 (age 5) Elsa from Frozen	151
Figure 36. Child 13 (age 5) Matilda & Miss Honey	151
Figure 37. Child 2 (age 5) Snow White	152
Figure 38. Child 4 (age 5) Retelling of Little Rabbit Foo Foo	161
Figure 39. Child 2 (age 5) Snow White	161
Figure 40. This is not my Hat by Jon Klassen	162
Figure 41. I Stole it from a big fish. He was asleep when I did it & Children's Comments.....	163
Figure 42. Images of the Fish & Children's Comments.....	163
Figure 43. And even if he does wake up, he probably won't notice it's gone & Children's Comments	163
Figure 44. So, I am not worried about that & Children's Comments	164
Figure 45. child 1 (age 5) Reading Space, Cinderella's Carriage	179
Figure 46. Child 2 (age 5) Reading Space, Cinderella's Carriage	179
Figure 47. Child 3 (age 5) Reading Space, Cinderella's Carriage	179
Figure 48. Child 4 (age 5) In the Reading Area.....	180
Figure 49. Child 5 (age 5) Cinderella's Carriage	180
Figure 50. Child 14 (age 5) Cinderella's Carriage	180
Figure 51. child 13 (age 5) Writing Table in the Classroom	180
Figure 52. Nursery Reading Space	181
Figure 53. Cinderella's Carriage	181
Figure 54. Child 1 (age 5) The Living Room	188
Figure 55. Child 1 (age 5) My Bedroom.....	188
Figure 56. Child 3 (age 5) The Bedroom.....	189
Figure 57. Child 4 (age 5) The Living Room	189
Figure 58. Child 5 (age 5) The Playroom	189
Figure 59. Child 8 (age 4) The Bedroom.....	190
Figure 60. child 4 (age 5) Original Scrapbook Entry and Transcribed Narrative.....	199
Figure 61. Storyteller Data.....	200
Figure 62. Authoring Framework	208
Figure 63. Child 5 (age 5) Image for Storybook.....	209
Figure 64. Child 14 (age 5) Image for Storybook.....	209
Figure 65. Child 4 (age 5) Image for Storybook.....	210
Figure 66. Original Photograph & Prisma Version	210
Figure 67. Original Photograph & Prisma Version	211
Figure 68. Example of Children's Handwriting	212
Figure 69. Example of Children's Intertextual Knowledge	213
Figure 70. Research Themes.....	221
Figure 71. The Children's Stories (...and some from adults)	221
Figure 72. Reading Spaces Framework	224

List of Abbreviations

BERA	British Education Research Association
CILIP	The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CLPE	Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
DfE	Department for Education
ERIC	Ethical Research Involving Children
ESCR	Economic and Social Research Council
ILA	International Literacy Association
NC	National Curriculum
NCRCL	National Centre for Research in Children's Literature
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
SLA	School Library Association
UKLA	United Kingdom Literacy Association
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

Abstract

Capturing children's voices when they talk about their everyday experiences has long been a focus for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. Yet, despite this desire to enable children's voices to be heard, their voices are still seldom sought in decision making processes and practices. This also applies to young children's views of reading for pleasure. In response, this research project adopted an emic approach, encouraging children to share their perspectives about how they experience reading, with participation at the heart of the project. To do this the research was anchored in the traditions of educational research, drawing from, and focusing on, the traditions of children's rights and the sociology of childhood, creating a theoretical framework that utilises four distinct but complementary disciplinary domains: Children's Literature, Education, Childhood Studies, and Children's Geographies.

The research asked questions about what, who and where of reading for these children, both now and in the past, in two phases, the first ethnographic immersion in the setting, the second participatory activities informed by the ethnographic phase, so I refer to it as ethnographically inflected. The second phase featured a Mosaic approach using creative methods including scrapbooking, child conferencing, object elicitation, literacy events and storytelling, to record the children participants' individual experiences of reading. The data from the two phases are intertwined in the findings and discussion chapters.

The findings represent the '*children's stories*' and are divided into three sections; '*children's choices, agency, and autonomy*', '*the child and the reading environment*' and '*communities of readers: sharing stories.*' The discussions surfaced a love of reading, but also an awareness of different kinds of reading. The emotional dimension of reading for pleasure proved central in discussion with the children as participants, teaching professionals and parents/guardians/carers.

From these findings a Reading Spaces Framework was developed to represent the complex multivalent reading environments children operate within. The framework comprises of six key spaces, categorised as textual, imaginative, emotional, functional, metacognitive, and physical. The children not only changed and manipulated the boundaries of these spaces but also confidently navigated, blurred, and renegotiated all the spaces simultaneously. As a result of these findings the research recommends more '*literacy events*' (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8), reviews of classroom and home book collections, the co-creation of physical reading spaces in the classroom and the need for teaching professionals to share their enthusiasm and love of books in more explicit ways.

Chapter One
Introducing the Study

Chapter One: Introducing the Study

To begin, I am mindful of Aristotle's assertion about the relationship between learning and pleasure where he argued that '*naturally, all men desire to know (eidenai)*' (Lear, 1988:1). This sentiment was echoed by Erasmus (1497) who stated that education and learning should be underpinned by the notion of pleasure, as it would enable levels of engagement that offer opportunities to discover new vistas that can, in turn, transform how one sees the world. Further, Erasmus (1497:114) suggested that learning should have:

...a constant element of enjoyment.... mingled with our studies, so that we think of learning as a game rather than a form of drudgery, for no activity can be continued for long if it does not to some extent afford pleasure to the participant.

Since these arguments were first made, practitioners and academics have had many debates about the relationship between education, learning and pleasure. Whilst some have separated these elements to an extent, others have concluded that learning should fundamentally be about fostering an individual's ability to make sense of their worlds and to develop creativity, curiosity to learn and imagination. This runs alongside the notion that learning can, at times, be frustrating, perplexing and mystifying (Mumford, 2014) and so can stretch an individual's capacity and capability, resulting in new ways of seeing and engaging. These ideas about transformative learning, participation, and pleasure, in relation to younger children and their reading, are at the heart of this thesis.

I begin this chapter by setting out how I arrived at my research framework and start to locate my positionality in relation to the research. This includes discussing some key influences informing this project, something which in turn necessitates starting to explore the disciplinary backgrounds against which the research takes place. It then goes on to lay out the structure of the thesis and outline what the following chapters will contain, setting the overall scene.

1.1 Educational Research

In any research endeavour the researcher needs to communicate their ontological and epistemological position to anchor and ground their work in a particular research paradigm. In this case the project is positioned within the tradition of educational research. The ontological position and priority of this project is to explore the contextual and subjective issues involved in reading for pleasure in a particular educational setting rather than objectively measuring the impact or influence of any given factor relating to children's experiences of reading for pleasure. Educational research and scholarship

emanate from a wide range of disciplines, theoretical orientations, and methodological approaches (British Educational Research Association, (BERA), 2023) making it multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in nature (Bridges, 2016), which resonates with the theoretical framework, described later, in that it encompasses multiple disciplinary domains. The research began with ethnographic immersion in the setting and later employed participatory approaches designed to elicit more information about what observation had revealed, both of which are, according to Bridges (2016:350), *'forms of research representation and established ingredients of the educational research worlds in the UK'*. This project, typically for educational research, aims to potentially inform educational practices, as discussed in chapters 3, 4 & 5.

1.1.1 What I wanted to study.

Key to understanding the role and value of a research framework is that it is an *'argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous'*, where the term argument is envisaged as a *'series of sequenced, logical propositions the purpose of which is to ground the research study'* (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:5). The construction of this framework began when I first thought about *'what I wanted to study'* and *'why it matters,'* both to me personally and to potentially to a wider audience (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:3). Once I established what I wanted the focus of the research to be, which I next go on to discuss, my considerations turned to how to go about studying it, that being, what my methodology would be.

The *'architecture of this thesis'* (Trafford & Lesham, 2002:12) is based upon my passion for exploring children's love of books and reading and predicated on working with children, teaching professionals and parents in meaningful ways to elicit and capture their personal narratives about reading. In particular, the central tenet and focus of this project was to capture children's personal reading histories and their experiences of books and reading, in their own words.

Focusing on children's voices and their everyday lived experiences regarding what and how they read is significant because their understandings and views are rarely sought and so remain *'untapped'* and largely absent from research and policy (Cole, 2008:2). Horton and Kraftl (2006:71) drawing on the work of Chaney (2002:10) refer to ideas of everyday experiences as *'everydayness'* and through their work invite researchers and professionals to reflect upon the idea of the *'everydayness'* of children's experiences, defined as the detail that tends to be overlooked and *'routinely considered as unremarkable'* (Horton & Kraftl, 2006:71). The purpose of this project, therefore, is to foreground the everydayness of children's reading as remarkable, significant, and insightful in terms of understanding children's lived experiences during their reading journeys. Moreover, through systematic analysis this

project will develop a framework that will attempt to explain the factors involved in children's reading journeys and offer recommendations for practice based upon the findings. In addition, as Horton and Kraftl (2006) contend, everydayness needs to be conceptualised and appreciated from the perspective of the child who is experiencing it. Therefore, this thesis will focus on, and pay attention to, what is happening for the child participants, with professional and parental perspectives being decentred.

The paucity of such work is in stark contrast to the numerous and well documented discussions and debates about literacy and education from adult perspectives. For years, researchers from many disciplines, policymakers, and others have argued over, and constructed theories about, literacy policy, literacy pedagogy and how literacy is conceived. Some of the earliest work understood as about education, such as that by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, established both tone and tradition¹. Although he contended in the seminal text *Emile* (1817:52), that '*childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling, and nothing is more foolish than to try to substitute ours for theirs*', the narrative centres on a novelistic device, the constructed fictional child, so the author's adult assumptions about childhood are dominant. This, therefore, can be seen as reflecting and, to an extent, originating, the tradition of educational research being commissioned to capture adults' understandings and versions of how children experience schooling and reading. Such work has generally focussed on the more functional aspects of these experiences.

In response to this tradition, therefore, a crucial feature of this educational research project will be to adopt an emic approach and ask younger children about their lived experiences and histories of reading for pleasure, focussing on questions about what they loved reading when they were younger, what they love reading now, who they love to read with (if anyone) and where they love to read. The emphasis on the word '*love*' in these questions flags up that this is also a project about affect and emotion (Horton & Kaftl, 2006), although reading and books, of course, may engender negative emotional states such as dread or embarrassment too.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

Before exploring these broad questions, it is essential to state that I am less interested in how reading is taught in schools and the more functional aspects of reading, than in the pleasures or fears that reading holds for younger children and their engagement with books and reading in their everyday lives, something which reflects their emotional relationship with text. This means that children's voices are central to this project with the children participants cast as the '*unrivalled experts in their own*

¹ This is ironic, given that this was not his intent. When someone wrote to him saying he wanted to raise his son like Emile, Rousseau said, "So much the worse, sir, for you and your son" (Douthwaite, 2002: 135).

fields' (Cooper, 1993:325), and that although adult voices are included, they are not the focus. Given this, the overall aims and objectives of this educational research project have been developed as follows:

- To work with children in meaningful ways to capture their individual narratives with regards their reading experiences and histories in nursery and primary reception education and at home to inform educational practices.
- To use both an ethnographic approach (phase one) and a creative participatory Mosaic approach (phase two) incorporating Scrapbooks and other creative research methods as stimuli or prompts to capture aspects of children's reading experiences through child conferencing (Clark & Moss, 2015).
- To work with teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians to capture their individual experiences of reading and to capture their reading histories as younger people.
- To produce high quality research that offers insights into the ways in which children, teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians engage with the love of books and reading.

1.3 Disciplinary Background

Having described the aims and objectives of the research agenda, I next outline the disciplinary context of this research project, as it has informed and guided my thinking. Broadly speaking, this research project sits between four distinct but complementary disciplinary domains: Children's Literature, Education, Childhood Studies, and Children's Geographies. As will be discussed further in the Literature Review, all these domains are important to my understanding of practice and research. The differences between them are productive for this research project although also making it more complex. For example, whilst within Education the literature around reading and literacy is well established and typically analyses educational reading practices, Children's Literature, as it has developed since the 1980s, is grounded in both librarianship and education and is now embedded in several academic disciplines including Childhood Studies, Education and Literature.

The disciplinary context grows yet more complex when drawing on and working within the discipline of Childhood Studies. This is because it is both multi and cross-disciplinary and has a theory base that derives from other disciplines including literature, sociology, cultural and media studies, history, and psychology. Like the related discipline of Children's Geographies, Childhood Studies is an evolving interdisciplinary domain that attempts to critique and analyse the '*human-life course that is legally recognised and socially defined as distinct from adulthood*' (James & James, 2012:25).

The last domain, Children's Geographies, a sub-discipline of human geography, draws on the central tenets of Childhood Studies where childhood is defined as '*socially and spatially constructed, arguing that children are subjects and social actors in their own right*' (Katz, 2009:81; James et al., 1998; Qvortrup et al., 1994). Children's geographies are therefore also an interdisciplinary endeavour, drawing scholars from a variety of disciplinary, conceptual, and methodological backgrounds.

Further, both Childhood Studies and Children's Geographies prioritise the importance of exploring children's experiences and perceptions of their own lives, their interests, and concerns as well as their priorities (Clark, 2005; Kraftl et al., 2014; Christensen & James, 2017). They also concur in their argument that although certain spaces (school, home, etc.) are perceived by adults as being constructed for children, without children's voices commenting on these spaces this will inevitably be a limited understanding. Consequently, they state that it is necessary to interrogate children's perspectives and experiences of space and place to understand notions of children's agency.

These concepts and discourses of childhood are also positioned within some of the frameworks used to explore and analyse Children's Literature. This term is used to describe not only a set of texts but also an academic discipline, although as Peter Hunt (2011) provocatively pointed out, the term could be considered an oxymoron. Hunt suggested that 'children' are commonly connoted as immature and literature per se is associated with sophistication in both text and reading therefore potentially rendering the two terms incompatible (Hunt, 2011:42). His comment was meant to stimulate debate about how children and literature are seen in society. He can be considered to have succeeded, given the growth of interest in Children's Literature as a discipline and the many academic journals, monographs, and theses (amongst other materials) that have been produced which are dedicated to analysing texts specifically created for children. This does not inherently imply exploring what readers do with books, although some work within the discipline does precisely that.

Further, the disciplinary domain is now associated with a range of charities and organisations committed to creating resources and supporting children's reading, along with the production and history of children's books. These include the International Literacy Association (ILA), United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA), Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, the School Library Association (SLA), Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), National Literacy Trust (NLT) and Book Trust.

Moreover, the discipline has several dedicated units and centres across Britain, including Newcastle University's Children's Literature Unit and the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL) located in Roehampton University. Alongside this lies research conducted by scholars from

across Higher Education, in schools, and within literacy and educational associations and organisations. Two key studies were significant to the development of this thesis. They were carried out by Teresa Cremin, Marilyn Mottram, Fiona Collins, Sacha Powell and Kimberly Safford for the UKLA. Phase one of the project was *Teachers as Readers*, undertaken in 2006-7, followed in 2007-8 by Phase 2, *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers* (Cremin et al., 2014). In addition, annual surveys and reviews carried out by the National Literacy Trust of young people’s reading with a specific focus on reading for pleasure were introduced during the period when this research was initiated, which further stimulated its development.

The centrality, for this project, of capturing children’s experiences of their own worlds originates from two complementary traditions within these disciplines, as can be seen in Figure 1, below, these being the sociology of childhood and children’s rights. Together they inform the theoretical rationale for the research, which is, as noted above, drawn from all four disciplinary domains. The sociology of childhood and children’s rights, blur, and overlap, in terms of the specific focus on children as ‘*active agents and constructors of their own social worlds*’ (Lipponen et al., 2015:936) and sits at the heart of many of the issues addressed by the four disciplines.

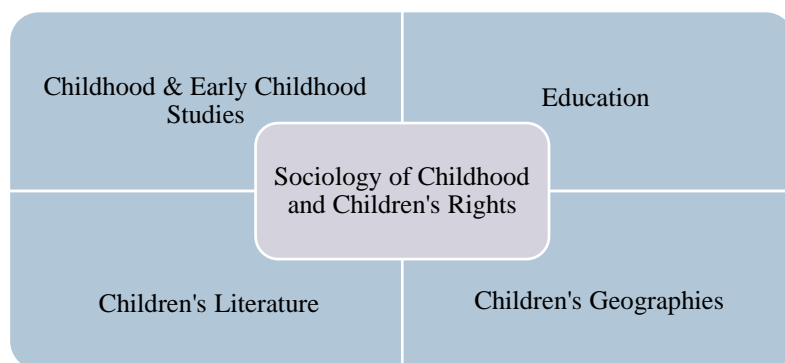


Figure 1. Research Theoretical Framework.

1.4 Personal Rationale

I will be returning to issues of positionality throughout this thesis, but as a brief introduction I offer a summary rationale here. I have worked for over a decade as a Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies and during that period have spent time in a range of early years and primary settings. Alongside my interest in classroom practice, I have an ongoing engagement with the history and development of children’s reading. More specifically, this research is informed by a particular aspect of reading, which also informs my practice in settings, that being ‘reading for pleasure’. Definitions of this concept will be explored in the Literature Review and in the final chapters. As outlined above, this research project spans a range of disciplines. This is, I believe, inevitable when exploring a subject that involves

children's experiences of reading, reading spaces, children's agency and voice, classroom practices, researching with children and the texts/narratives children choose to read. In relation to this personal rationale, I would add that the notion of experience is central to the research and that consequently the term will be used throughout. In defining experience, I draw on Dewey's argument that it is created by the interaction between the individual and the world. According to Dewey *'experience is a central aspect of this interaction and thus is a communicative, historic and cultural phenomenon rather than an individual or mental one'* (Hohr, 2012:1).

1.5 Research Context

The research project was situated in the North East of England in a nursery/primary school in the county of Northumberland. To give an idea of the regional context, Northumberland is a county where there are several different kinds of community. On the one hand, there are towns that were major centres of heavy industry and are now post-industrial areas and on the other hand there are a large set of rural communities. The location of the research was in one of the post-industrial areas, which are mostly located in the south-east of the county. The overall population of Northumberland is *'approximately 316,000 and spans 5013 km with 97% of this is classed as rural'* (Northumberland in Context, 2022). 49% of the population live in rural areas in comparison to the North East more generally (where the percentage is 18.8%) and the rest of England where it is 18.9%. 13.2% of the population live in one of the 10% most deprived areas of England compared to 16.98% in the North East more generally and 9.9% across England. Further, 20.8% of the population are classed as income deprived and 25.4% are employment deprived (Know Northumberland, 2022). The chosen school lies in an area where there is higher-than-average unemployment as defined by the Department for Work & Pensions (Know Northumberland, 2022). A high level of residents either have no qualifications or qualifications equal to 1 or more GCSEs at grade D, below the national average (Know Northumberland, 2022). Whilst the figures with regards income, unemployment, and qualifications help to set the context for the study, the research is not concerned with making these types of variables a particular focus and the child participants will not be differentiated according to their individual socio-economic circumstances.

A practitioner acquaintance from my network suggested this specific school might be interested in participating in research exploring reading for pleasure and so I contacted the School Literacy Lead Teaching Professional to discuss the possibility. I subsequently expressed my interest in working with the nursery and the reception class. The project design was crafted to ensure there were multiple opportunities to gain insights into children's lived experiences of their reading histories and current

reading experiences via different approaches. The objective of this educational research was to work with children in meaningful ways to elicit their individual narratives, as is more fully discussed in the Methodology chapter. In addition to the children, the adults around them were also involved, although not as the focus. As also discussed in the Methodology chapter, the teaching team were interviewed to gain insights into both their personal and professional experiences of reading and questionnaires were shared with parents/carers/guardians to elicit their experiences as readers as well exploring their perceptions of their parental/carer role in relation to reading.

1.5.1 Introducing the Project

The first event that occurred related to the research project involved the parents/carers/guardians of the nursery/reception children and was predominantly organised by the teaching team to introduce the programme *Read Write Inc.* which was part of the school's literacy strategy. During the session the team requested the support of the parents/carers/guardians to work in partnership with the school in developing their children's literacy. It is well documented that parents and the home environment support both the early teaching of reading and the love of books and are crucial to the ways children develop language and literacy skills (Levy, 2008; Minns, 1997). The school regarded the parents/guardians and carers as well placed to support their children's reading progress, with parents eager to be involved with their children's reading at school (Cremin et al., 2014). This event served as the initial springboard for this research project and highlighted, to me, that the teaching staff were interested in the research outcomes in terms of gaining real insights and understandings of the children's experiences of reading. They also hoped that the outcomes would inform educational practice and thought it might also go some way towards developing and strengthening the partnership relationship between the parents/guardians/carers and the school staff. This partnership approach was emphasised in the *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading: Final Report* written by Jim Rose in 2006, where he suggested that developing, at the earliest stage, a child's positive attitude to literacy is very important and that parents and carers working in partnership with '*settings and schools do much to foster these attitudes*' (Rose, 2006:4).

As part of that event, I was introduced to the adults as a researcher working with the teaching team to explore children's reading experiences, supporting the team in their thinking about classroom reading spaces, and my PhD supervisor and myself also conducted a workshop entitled *For the Love of Books*, designed to introduce the research project's objectives and aims and to allow the parents/carers/guardians time and space to discuss their own experiences of developing as readers. The workshop used object elicitation employing a mixture of picturebooks and comics to stimulate

conversation and memory (Gibson, 2019). The participants were also invited to complete a questionnaire about their reading and given copies of the research information sheet and consent forms and asked to give consent for their children to take part. All the 11 parents/guardians/carers who attended the event gave consent for their children to take part in the research. Following the event those parents/guardians/carers who did not attend the event were sent a copy of the information and forms via the children's school reading bags with a request to return them completed.

1.5.2 The Classroom

The classroom space most of the activities took place in was a combined classroom with designated spaces for nursery and primary aged children. This busy and often noisy space had zoned areas for writing, mathematics, construction, play and reading; there was also a kitchen area with a large table in the middle. The Nursery Teaching Professional and Reception Class Teaching Professional located there worked with thirty-nine children in total, consisting of twenty-seven reception children (all aged five) and twelve nursery children (all aged four). For the nursery children this combined space was intended to allow them to gain insights into reception class activities and support their transitions into formal education, and they routinely joined the reception children for curriculum related activities.

I spent seven weeks immersing myself in the setting, collecting data through observing the children and teaching team activities around books. From the outset the children knew that I was interested in doing some research with them about their reading, that I wanted to learn about what they considered important and memorable. After this ethnographic phase of the research, the children were familiar with my presence, and I had gained an understanding of the social and cultural context of the school and classroom. This is reflected in the findings and discussion chapters along with the participatory elements. Next, I talked to them more about the project and moved into participatory activities that took place over sixteen weeks, by giving all thirty-nine children a Scrapbook. The Scrapbook and related activities will be described and discussed further in the Methodology chapter. From this point the participatory data collection aspect of the project began, something which used a range of research tools to elicit children's voices.

1.6 Key Influences

Some of the key influences on this thesis were initially encountered some years ago when I was an undergraduate student studying Childhood Studies and Children's Literature at university. There are many writers, practitioners and scholars that have had a profound impact on my understanding of these disciplinary areas. Two foundational writers have been particularly influential, however. One is Aidan Chambers, especially through his publications *The Reluctant Reader* (1969), *Introducing Books to*

Children (1973, 1984), *The Reading Environment* (1991), *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk* (1996) and *Reading Talk* (2001). The second key influence is Margaret Meek, whose work has been central to my experience of attempting to both understand the complexities of reading and the discipline of Children's Literature. Her writings have informed and supported my understanding since I first encountered them, especially *The Cool Web* (1977), *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* (1988), *Coming of Age in Children's Literature* with Victor Watson (2003), *Information and Book Learning* (1996), *Learning to Read* (1982), *Achieving Literacy: Longitudinal Studies of Adolescents Learning to Read* (1983) and *On Being Literate* (1991). I now outline how specific texts by these authors have had an impact on the shape and approach this research project has adopted.

1.6.1 Tell Me: Children, Reading, and Talk

Firstly, Aidan Chambers' publications *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk* (1996) and *The Reading Environment* (1991) have influenced my thinking in developing a conceptual framework for this project. The reading framework Chambers created, '*The Reading Circle*' becomes a point of reference in the Literature Review, but also in the final two chapters, where the ideas of '*selection, response, reading and the enabling adult*' are employed in attempting to explain the complex interactions encountered during the research (Chambers, 1996:4). Further, Chambers' (1996:2) key idea in *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk* is that '*talking well about books is a high-value activity*'. Starting from this position, Chambers (1996:2) suggests, helps children to talk about reading, as well as helping them articulate their everydayness (Chambers, 1996:2). The '*tell me*' approach is simply a way of asking questions and was used during my discussions with the child participants (Chambers, 1996:1). Employing it helped to ensure that children's experiences remained central, and that their voices were heard during the conferencing activities discussed in the Methodology Chapter.

1.6.2 How Texts Teach What Readers Learn

Margaret Meek has been hugely influential on my understanding and interpretation of the role and value of books or rather what Meek (1988) calls 'real' texts. This textual distinction was advocated in her seminal booklet *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* published in 1988. Although published thirty-two years ago, I feel that both the messages and ideology are just as pertinent today as they were then. Originally designed to be delivered as a workshop or a lecture this booklet offers reference points to specific texts, mostly books for children and young people, to make key points about the process of learning to read. From Meek's work, I drew several tenets, the first being that '*children learn to read by reading*,' an idea initially put forward by Frank Smith (1976:297). Meek argues that this is not ground-breaking and may seem obvious, but also states that this seemingly simple idea reveals

something quite important about the activity, namely that becoming a good reader is about practicing and rehearsing. Working with this core idea she further suggests that practice, pleasure, and persistence, '*the three p's*', (Meek, 1988:3) are needed to become proficient and are necessary to become a good reader in the sense of competence, but more importantly, central to continuing to enjoy reading.

Meek (1988:3) also argues that becoming a good reader is quite a high stakes activity because we need to learn how to read to be recognised '*by others as someone who can learn.*' This highlights the significance, value, and role of reading in children's lives and the necessity of mastering this complex learning challenge. Smith (cited in Meek, 1988:3) drew on research conducted in the 1970s to create an alternative paradigm that contends that when we think about this idea of recognition and the importance of being able to read, then we can reclaim reading for learners, whilst at the same time freeing teachers from what he calls '*enslavement to pedagogic methodology*'. Smith suggests that this will help both adults and children to rediscover reading as having '*language at its core*' (Smith cited in Meek, 1988:3) and as something that is inherently enjoyable and transformative.

I will argue in this research that Meek's '*three p's*', are indeed integral to the reading process. However, as will be discussed later, I indicate that these are not the only components and that context and reading environment are also crucial. The importance of developing specific reading spaces and environments is acknowledged and there is a wealth of research and literature describing the virtues and value of creating and developing effective spaces. In talking to the child participants about their reading places and spaces, this research project adds to that literature in a distinctive way.

Meek's work also influenced the evolution and development of the research questions, aims and objectives. They were formulated in response to the questions Meek (1988) asked adult readers to reflect upon regarding their childhood reading. She presents these questions as a way of connecting them with younger generation's experiences of learning to read and reading for pleasure. They include:

- *What can you remember of learning to read?*
- *Who was with you?*
- *Where did it happen?*
- *What did you do?* (Meek, 1988:4)

I adapted this list and added a question to it, which was 'what did you read?' Meek does point out that in many of the academic texts about reading and teaching reading there is little reference made to what people have read in the past, and although it is not central to her work what she says indicates that it is a useful question. These questions, as noted, were asked of adults, whilst I intended to predominantly

use them with children. Given the scant amount of published research with younger children with regards their reading choices and everyday experiences this research project has been developed to contribute to filling this gap.

Going further, regarding adults, reflections on these questions are likely to be related to a sketchy and fragmented set of memories that are filtered through the lens of childhood nostalgia for many, a point I return to in the later chapters. Indeed, reflecting on my reading experiences of what I read, who I read with and where I read, I realise that they can be characterised as patchy and confused, if not entirely nostalgic.

Both scholars have taught me to learn to learn by listening and watching (Wolf & Brice-Heath, 1992). Finally, Chambers' 'tell me' Approach and Meek's 'three p's' were also fundamental in informing the research methods, including the Scrapbooks designed to elicit the child participants' responses.

1.6.3 Barthes and the golden thread.

Having discussed the two key theorists that have influenced my thinking about children's reading for pleasure, I would also like to flag up the importance of the work of Roland Barthes to this project. The thesis particularly draws on two of his best-known pieces of work 'The Death of the Author' (1968) and 'S/Z' (1970)². There he outlined how reading (and writing) literature could be seen in terms of active and passive participation (characterised as postmodern and modern ways of interacting with text) (Barthes, 1974:3). These ideas, as employed in this thesis, act as a 'golden thread' through it and are part of the philosophical underpinning of the research. His key concepts of 'readerly texts,' (2.3.4) 'writerly texts' (2.3.5) and 'author and sriptor,' (2.3) are used to explain ways of thinking about creators of text, participation, and the active child reader. The latter concept became significant in two ways, the first regarding children's authorship of the stories of their reading lives, the second regarding their co-creation of an actual picturebook. As explored throughout the thesis I align these ideas with the traditions of the sociology of childhood and children's rights.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis.

1.7.1 The Literature Review

The Literature Review draws together, analyses, and evaluates the relevant critical literature and research thus establishing the academic context for the study. It also draws on some policy documents

² There were many translations of the work of Roland Barthes in English available and their differing language and understandings of his work was challenging to negotiate. When referring to the work of Barthes, consequently, although I have included the original year of publication, I draw on translations of 'The Death of the Author' and 'S/Z,' but also draw conclusions about his work based on elements of the Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory (2005) edited by Herman, Jahn & Ryan.

relevant to the classroom setting and as suggested above is also underpinned by Barthes' philosophical ideas as well as Meek and Chambers' work on literacy. Throughout this review key terms integral to the themes of the research will be explored, offering a range of perspectives drawing on the disciplinary domains of Education, Children's Geographies, Children's Literature and Childhood Studies. This chapter will look at research from these disciplines that is both embedded in and moves beyond what Pia Christensen and Allison James (2017) assert was the historic approach to research 'on', rather than 'with', children. They argue that *'traditionally, childhood and children's lives were explored solely through the views and understandings of their adult caretakers who claim to speak for them'* (Christensen & James, 2017:4). This chapter will therefore consider the ways in which children are typically perceived merely as passive recipients of adult generated spaces and practices, created from a position of adults assuming they know what is best for children. This will be juxtaposed with research which takes a different stance, where children are seen as active and having at least some agency.

In grounding and situating the research agenda in a theoretical framework (as mentioned above), key concepts from the four distinct and yet interrelated discipline areas will inform a discussion that examines discourses of participation involving voice in relation to agency, age, and competency. Further, the discussion explores and attempts to define the concept of reading spaces, both physical, textual, and conceptual. Understandings of children's books will be analysed, including both historical and contemporary perspectives, so linking to ideas of reading and literacies. Educational perspectives on spaces, policy and practice are also examined in terms of their creation and how they are organised and ordered by adults who assume the responsibility of knowing what children need and what is desirable for specific learning outcomes.

1.7.2 Methodology Chapter Overview

In the Methodology chapter I will describe and discuss the research strategy, study design, data collection and data analysis, incorporating a reflexive account of how some of the decisions were made, including those around the theoretical framework. The chapter starts with a broad overview of educational research philosophy, discussing both interpretivism and positivism. It then outlines the ethnographic and participatory strategies used, including observation and fieldnotes, reading audits, scrapbooking, child conferencing, individual interviews, object elicitation, literacy events and storytelling. The participatory aspects of the project focused on collaboration, co-production, and knowledge creation. The systematic process of research data analysis will be presented linking to and ensuring the cogency and reliability of the research endeavour. This chapter also focuses on the way that the project highlighted several ethical dilemmas raised specifically by working and researching with children of this age group. The research, therefore, needed to be designed to allow the children to

find their own level of response and to have the autonomy to decide what information they were prepared to share (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008).

1.7.3 Findings & Discussion: What we saw, made and found along the way...

This chapter is dedicated to the themes that emerged through detailed thematic analysis. It is divided into sections that map onto the research questions ‘*what do you enjoy reading now and in the past?*’ ‘*where do you enjoy reading?*’ and finally, ‘*who do you like to read with/if anyone?*’ The themes that emerged from these questions mean that there are subsections on ‘*much-loved books: reading choices,*’ ‘*the power of the page: discourses of reading,*’ ‘*schooling literacy: the ‘letter of reading,’ ‘the child & the environment*’ and ‘*communities of readers: sharing stories.* In each case the presentation of the findings will be followed by a critical discussion. Some of my observations from throughout the research (written at the time, and so in note form) are included in boxes coloured blue although the majority of data from the ethnographic phase is intertwined with that of the participatory phase. Examples of Scrapbook entries are used to illustrate the ways in which they acted as catalysts for discussions during the child conferencing activities. Finally, this chapter will showcase the children’s voices in terms of their everydayness, that being what they chose to share, which surfaces ‘*children’s everyday reading lives*’ from the perspective of the children who are experiencing it (Cremin et al., 2014:1).

1.7.4 A Compelling Tale: Contribution to Theory, Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

The final chapter begins with a review of the main thesis of the research, drawing together all the key findings into a new conceptual framework. This framework explains the complexities of the research project within six key spaces, categorised as textual, imaginative, emotional, functional, metacognitive, and physical. The concept of spaces surfaced during observations and conversations with the child participants. This conceptual framework offers new ways of seeing reading and illuminates the participants’ ability to confidently navigate these spaces simultaneously. I not only discuss the ways in which these children navigate the spaces but also explore how they manipulate the boundaries of these spaces. Within this chapter I will argue that reading inhabits spaces which are intertwined and that the boundaries that define those spaces are constantly blurred and renegotiated by children. In addition, specific recommendations will be made to improve the design of reading spaces within the schooling context and spaces at home. The chapter will also offer insights into the sort of texts the children preferred, and work on developing a better understanding of the complex journeys that children navigate to develop as readers.

To conclude, this chapter has set the scene for the project. As mentioned earlier the theoretical underpinning for this research focuses on complementary traditions; sociology of childhood and children's rights, which form the central theoretical tenet drawn from the four key disciplinary domains (Lipponen et al., 2015). The next chapter is concerned with setting the context for the study through exploration, analysis and evaluation of key themes that ground the study in historical and contemporary debates from a range of differing perspectives and disciplines. Dominant discourses around reading, contemporary picturebooks, the history of books for children, reading spaces and storytelling, all of which engender a love of books and reading for pleasure, will be incorporated. Alongside these ideas it will offer an appraisal of the evolution of how the setting approached reading instruction given the impact of the project and explore how reading is governed in Early Years and Primary educational settings.

Chapter Two
A Review of the Literature

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

I love reading and I love books. I love the way they smell and feel. I love the journeys that they take me on. I love the escapism and the reality that they offer... For me, developing a love of reading and of books is the most important thing we can do as teachers (Bushnell, 2021).

The extract above, from Adam Bushnell's foreword from *Developing a love of reading and books* (Gill et al., 2021), captures his genuine passion for books and reading, whilst recognising the importance of the role of teaching professionals in supporting and developing children's love and enthusiasm for books. It correlates with the aim of this research regarding capturing, in their own words, children's experiences of books and reading for pleasure. I also chose this quotation to begin the chapter as it reflects my own passion for reading and a curiosity about the part it plays in children's lives.

During this chapter, I explore various academic literatures and in doing so will make my understanding of perspectives on childhood, children's learning, children's literature, concepts of reading and reading environments transparent. I do this in the interest of establishing a theoretical framework and showing where this study is located. The theoretical framework defines key concepts, evaluates, selects, and combines relevant theories, grounds the research, and makes explicit the tacit knowledge and understanding that drives and underpins the research agenda, as well as supporting the interpretation and analysis of the research data.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This review of literature offers a modest but unique contribution to knowledge in terms of bringing together and synthesising key concepts, models, and assumptions from a range of disciplinary domains to create a distinctive theoretical framework. This framework will present key concepts derived from the four complementary disciplinary domains mentioned in the introduction. I also flag up some relevant non-academic materials that have influenced classroom practices around literacy. Using these different lenses or sets of lenses will clarify the research agenda and locate and provide context for the study, in addition to establishing and outlining the underpinning theoretical framework integral to the research. This is achieved through the analysis, and evaluation of key ideas from both historical and contemporary perspectives. It is perhaps useful to note that the term framework may be perceived as being rather static, linear, and stable. However, this is not the case for this research as the theoretical ideas that guided the research evolved and changed over time, sometimes moving me into new

landscapes and revealing unfamiliar territory (Ravitch & Raggin, 2017). This resulted in me having to adapt and continually reflect upon my assumptions and interpretations of, not just in relation to the findings and discussion, but also regarding the critical literature and the differing perspectives that I utilised to help me focus the study.

At this juncture it is important to emphasise why these disciplinary domains are central to this project. In part this is because the concepts and theory that have emerged from them have had a significant impact on the ways that I, as a researcher and an academic, see childhood and subsequently see children. Of course, within humanities and social sciences, where these disciplinary domains reside, theories and different perspectives *'are neither right or wrong, neither verified nor disproved,'* and there is no hierarchy of perspectives in which some are automatically considered better than others (Nikolajeva, 2009:2). However, it is difficult to approach any research project without adopting a specific position towards the subject matter, as positionality is a process of *'internal dialogue and self-evaluation,'* as well as *'explicit recognition'* (Berger, 2013:2). The specific position adopted may affect not only the conceptual framework, of course, but also the collection and interpretation of data (Finlay, 2002). Whilst the following discussion outlines where my thinking comes from, I am mindful of the breadth of these disciplinary domains and that there are many ideas and perspectives that I chose to omit which may or may not have enhanced this research agenda.

This chapter contains four sections. The first reflects key debates and ongoing considerations in the discipline area of Childhood Studies. The central elements in the pale blue section in Figure 1, where the domains intersect, and this research is positioned, are the *'sociology of childhood'* and *'children's rights discourse'*. Whilst they appear in all the disciplines to an extent, they are arguably most central to this one. The section flags up key discourses, debates, and theoretical perspectives on childhood as a social construction, noting that there are many dominant discourses in tension regarding childhood which means there are actually multiple constructions, all of which have their own limitations and emphasis (Mills, 2003). The section also looks at contemporary debates and discussion regarding children's rights, participation, voice, and agency.

The discussion, in the second section, will build on these ideas and introduce perspectives on the evolution of children's books, constructions of the child reader and notions of space through the disciplinary lens of Children's Literature. The complexity of literature for children and arguments about the term quality in relation to children's books will be presented as these ideas permeate societal assumptions about both the books and those who read them. Further, it will look at the ways in which the creation of what Roland Barthes (1974 cited in Herman et al., 2005) describes as writerly and

readerly texts tend to reveal the author's view or constructions of the 'implied' reader or audience (Iser, 1974). Wolfgang Iser (1974) points out as Barthes (1974) does, that a literary work is not only the text itself but also actions of the individual responding to this text, which Iser calls the implied reader, which links to and is fundamental in this thesis in understanding differing constructions of childhood.

Concepts of reading and literacy which emerge from the literature of Education will be explored in part three. This literature questions assumptions about reading in terms of more traditional perspectives and models where it is '*often understood as the acquisition of comprehension skills on the one hand and interpretation of texts on the other*' (Maine & Waller, 2011:355). This also helps to locate this piece of research, as does the work on '*situated literacies*' (Barton et al., 2000:1) which further explores '*social institutions and the power relations that sustain them.*' It is here that some reference to policy is made.

Finally, the last section of the chapter will turn to Children's Geographies and discuss research addressing physical spaces in terms of educational and home contexts. Questions about who controls and shapes these spaces, as well as how they are used, foregrounds debates and discussions about reading spaces and environments.

I would like to flag up that throughout this chapter (and indeed the thesis) the word 'space' is used in several different ways. For instance, in part one, space is used in terms of the contested notion of childhood as a conceptual space. In part two, space is used to connote the textual spaces of children's books as well as the conceptual spaces of the child reader. Conceptual spaces are also discussed in part three in relation to the constraints and power dynamics of reading within educational settings. As noted above, in the fourth section, the spaces under discussion are physical spaces.

This chapter, therefore, will make my ideas and the decisions I have made regarding the research as it progressed transparent, as well as contextualising it and giving some indication of what less explored areas this research addresses, although overall it is the combination of these disciplines and the synthesis creating the theoretical framework that could be seen as the key contribution to knowledge.

2.2 Childhood Studies Discourse.

Because each and every one of us has been a child, we all believe we know what childhood is -or was... Early memories can be affected by later images, narratives, and experiences. Some seem clear, rational and conscious, while others lurk largely unacknowledged at an unconscious level...what we would like to think of as clear and rational ideas of what childhood is, and was, is arguably a tangled web of ideas, often illusory, which disguise much more complex meanings.

(Gittins, 2015:34).

According to Gittins (2015) childhood is a contested cultural idea, or set of ideas, which are filtered by individuals through the lens of memory, of personal experience. Gittins argues that memory is problematic, a *'slippery fish and often operates simultaneously at different levels,'* as it is constructed and reconstructed over time (Gittins, 2015:34). Discourses define childhood and what it is considered to be within any given culture, impacting on and influencing the ways in which humans, as contradictory and complex beings, adopt wider cultural images as personal memories (Gittins, 2015:35). This means that childhood, rather than being a *'real and material state of being'* is more an adult construction, which, *'disguises a multitude of contradictory memories, desires and myths'* (Gittins, 2015:35). This is very different from the experience of being a child. Both are significant in this research, as myths and adult constructions around childhood and actual children's lives are drawn together within it.

To begin with, it is needful to unpack the complexity of the notion of the *'view of the child'* (Burke, 2007). In this instance, the concept is helpful in enabling a critical awareness when considering possible frameworks for participation both in terms of researching with children and working with children in educational contexts. Burke (2007) argues that the view of the child or childhood is multifaceted and complex. A key idea or superordinate concept that underpins the thinking and position of this research, therefore, is that there are multiple ways of perceiving or viewing childhood. On the one hand, academic writers have referred to specific representations and views that are predominantly held by adults. On the other hand, however, children's status, according to Burke (2007:360), *'furnishes them with a particular view of their world or at least a legitimate perspective from a position of otherness'*. Thus, it is argued that children have legitimate views about their lived experiences and everydayness. Consequently, my emphasis on prioritising children's perspectives or views of their lived experiences reveals my positionality and ideology, grounding this research thesis. This is in line with academic developments of recent years, which have increasingly focused on the notion of a child's perspective and voice (James, 2007; Christensen & James, 2017; Kellett, 2011; Clark and Moss, 2015), especially in relation to the children's rights and participation agenda.

The discipline of Childhood Studies has, for many years, critiqued narrow versions of the child and childhood as defined by older academic disciplines (Woodhead, 2015). At the same time, it utilises thinking from many other disciplines to understand how childhoods are experienced by children and understood by adults. Debates about the nature of childhood were core to early discussions in the discipline when tensions emerged about the extent to which childhood is a natural or a social phenomenon. The former may be seen as relating to an essentialism of childhood that is founded, at

least in part, upon biological factors (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:36). There is, of course, a fundamental need for care as an aspect of children's lives, as children develop their independence and grow in self-reliance (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:26). However, as Martin Woodhead argued when discussing the history of Childhood Studies, the tendency to essentialise and naturalise childhood is rejected in much twentieth century research in this area (2015:21) and as Karen Sánchez-Eppler (2011:35) suggests researchers have '*striven to dismantle the essentialism of childhood.*' The tension between the natural and social is neatly summarised by James and Prout (1997:7) who state that, '*the immaturity of children is a biological fact of culture*' and then contrast this with childhood, which they argue '*is both constructed and reconstructed both for and by children.*' This principle of childhood as socially constructed is intended to guard against what Woodhead described as '*reductionist account of what children and childhood are really like*' (2015:21).

This discussion within the discipline highlights the tensions that surface when attempting to make any kind of distinction between 'children' and 'childhood.' For any enquiry, no matter how wide, complex, or narrow the subject, defining terms is crucial and within this academic sphere the search for a definition for the word 'childhood' is, as Richard Mills (2003) argued, tricky. Mills (2003) added that this is in part because of the need to define childhood variables such as race, class, culture, gender, and historical period, as well as cultural components that are inextricably linked to these variables. Finally, Mills stated that there is a '*lack of watertight compartments [...and it has an...] illusory and elusive nature*' meaning it is difficult to create firm definitions (2003:9). These complex ideas of childhood are contradictory, ambiguous, and conflicting, rendering the term problematic and open to multiple interpretations. This has been further complicated by the introduction of intersectionality to Childhood Studies, something that largely emerged in the mid-2010s, although aspects of the key tenets of the discipline do chime with it, as suggested above (Konstantoni et al., 2014)³. However, despite these complexities, there remains a loose argument that childhood can be defined as a '*general trajectory from dependency toward autonomy*' (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:36).

Many scholars in this field '*favour a clear distinction between 'real children' who are growing, learning, and playing and studies of 'childhood' or 'childhoods' as social constructions, as institution, cultural representation, discourse, and practice*' (Woodhead, 2015:19). The discipline also recognises that ideas and concepts about childhood impinge and impact on the everyday life of 'real children,' who, of course, '*contribute to the construction of their own childhoods*' (Woodhead, 2015:20) and some academic accounts reveal complicated relations, tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions

³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271698930_Intersectional_Childhoods_and_Inequalities-Seminar_Series_Briefing (Accessed: July 2022)

between society's ideas of childhood and the lived experiences of actual children (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011). Therefore, although there are times where I will be discussing conceptual childhoods in this thesis, I am mindful that ideas about childhood can and will influence how real children are perceived, which leads to specific practices and policies which have an impact upon them (Woodhead, 2015).

Whilst childhood is a widely recognised life stage, argued to stretch from birth to the point of taking on adult responsibilities and recognised competencies, its *'contours and meanings are deeply circumstantial, formed by particulars of each historical and social situation and the stories we tell about them'* (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:26). This relates to the comment by Diana Gittins that opens this chapter. Gittins (2015:34) argues that childhood is *'one of the few areas in life of which all humans have first-hand experience'* and so, having all experienced a childhood, our perspectives are coloured and often distorted by personal experiences and memories. This homogenising tendency, viewing childhood as a *'single universal phenomenon'* (James & Prout, 1997:8-9), fails to consider the diversity of children, and the diversity of discourses about childhood. In response, the discipline area is concerned with both historical and contemporary debates about childhood as a *'complex social phenomenon'* and a contested notion (Qvortrup et al, 1994; James & James, 2012:19; Tesar et al., 2016), foregrounding and committing to interdisciplinary approaches, not only regarding pedagogic practice but also approaches to researching with children. Therefore, in the past few decades Childhood Studies has become a catalyst for all aspects of applied research, including this study. The development of the discipline of Childhood Studies, then, is far reaching and incorporates many topographies.

This research project, as noted, is focused on two aspects of Childhood Studies, the sociology of childhood and the children's rights discourse which assist in grounding the research in a theoretical framework whilst offering a theoretical rationale (Lipponen et al., 2015:936). These traditions, as noted earlier, tend to blur and overlap as both focus (although not exclusively) on children as *'active agents'* and *'constructors of their own social worlds'* (Lipponen et al., 2015:936). These key traditions and concepts will be analysed from both historical and contemporary perspectives to ground the research and enable a more transparent understanding of my own positionality, something which links directly to the ethical deliberations in the Methodology chapter.

2.2.1 Sociology of Childhood

Having indicated that Childhood Studies explores how notions of childhood impact upon, and intertwine with, actual children's lives, this section further sets the context for the study by offering a brief history of influential concepts in the development and evolution of ways of perceiving and constructing childhood (Kellett, 2014).

Firstly, I would like to flag up, with the intent of swiftly moving beyond it, the concept of socialisation (Grusec, 2011). This concept is significant in terms of attempting to understand the many ways in which children learn and are taught to make sense of their social world. The direction of influence is apparent, for according to Chris Jenks (2015:61), *'the society shapes the individual.'* However, although I am interested in societal perspectives and constructs of 'childhood,' this research project is not an analysis of the inculcation of societal 'norms' through socialisation.

Many of the debates around childhood, once beyond socialisation and the tensions between the natural and social construction mentioned earlier, have been centred around the idea that contemporary concepts of childhood did not exist prior to modernity (Clarke, 2010:3) and so that twentieth and twenty-first century understandings and interpretations of childhood would not have made sense in previous centuries. These debates emerged after the publication of Philippe Ariès' seminal text *L'Enfant et la vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood*, published in 1962. This study of the history of the family, as a distinct area of analysis, received significant academic attention (Hareven, 1991) and stimulated the work of a new generation of scholars and researchers associated with disciplines related to *'family'* and *'childhood'*. Researchers were particularly drawn Ariès' provocative assertion (1962:125) that in medieval society *'the idea of childhood did not exist'*. In effect Ariès argued that during the Middle Ages children's lives were indistinguishable from those of adults, with childhood not seen as a distinct social category (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:38). Whilst remaining influential, his work came to be thoroughly critiqued, in part because of this assertion, and because of concerns about the use of aesthetic objects as historical evidence (Evans, 1997; Hendrick, 1992; Higonnet, 1998).

Ariès' work nonetheless suggested that more contemporary versions of childhood as distinct and separate from adulthood were a later development whereby childhood became seen as a *'natural and universally recognised phase of life'* (Clarke, 2010:3). Accordingly, childhood, as we understand it today, is seen as a special period separate from adulthood, something reflected in the development of institutions for children and policies that specifically address childhood. Going further, John Clarke (2010:3) suggests that childhood has become known as *'an artefact of modernity'* which Alan Prout (2005:10) asserted offers a particular version of childhood that is subsequently established as the *'cultural other'* to adulthood. The idea of the cultural other relates to concepts of *'otherness'* and *'othering'* (Jones, 2009:36; De Castro, 2004), where the latter is a process *'distancing and stigmatising those who are deemed to be different from a majority or powerful group'* (Jones, 2009:37). Thus, the othering of childhood is often paralleled with the *'othering'* experienced by women, which, as expressed through feminist perspectives, is a process which results in a lack of voice and participation

(Clark & Moss, 2015, 2005; Burke, 2007; Woodhead, 2015). This thesis, then, responds to the lack of voice and participation resulting from othering in deliberately seeking children's responses. Another concept dominant in this disciplinary area which tends to obscure the ways in which we 'see' capability and competency is the opacity of characterizing childhood as '*being and becoming*' (Prout, 2005:66). This serves to heighten the perceived oppositional, or binary, relationship between childhood and adulthood (Prout, 2005:10), again something that this research seeks to, in a small way, address.

Perceptions of these modern ideas about childhood were formed through diverse discourses about the status of the child, child labour, education, and welfare. Following the work of Ariès, these contemporary ideas about childhood have developed over the past four decades with an abundance of texts offering frameworks and alternative views of the ever-changing paradigms of childhood. Childhood, therefore, can be seen, as Michael Wyness (2015:1) suggests, as a collection of '*critical and complex ideas around the nature of biological, social and psychological growth in the early years.*' Subsequently, scholars and researchers turned to attempting to understand '*cultural specificity*' in terms of ideas about contemporary or modern childhood/s (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014:32). Another development is in research around language and culture. For example, David Rudd (2019:16) contends that the world of childhood is socially mediated through '*language and culture, whether the child rehearses these skills externally (in social interaction), internally (in imaginative play) or a mixture (storying)*', ideas which will be explored later in this chapter and further in the final chapters.

Finally, I turn to another seminal text, Allison James and Alan Prout's (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. This proved, like Ariès (1962) work to be a major contribution to the discipline as it merged key thinking and established and consolidated their research from the 1970s (Jenks, 2005), creating a new paradigm for Childhood Studies. James and Prout (1997:8-9) identified key features or tenets of the new paradigm, as follows:

1. *Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualising the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.*
2. *Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single universal phenomenon.*
3. *Children's social relationships and cultures as worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.*

4. *Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.*
5. *Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the projection of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.*
6. *Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is acutely present. That is to say, to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society.*

These too are contested ideas, given that Childhood Studies continues to evolve. For example, texts like *Reimagining Childhood Studies* by Spyros Spyrou, Rachel Rosen and Daniel Thomas Cook (2019) invite dialogue about the nature and boundaries of the discipline area. They see previous research as resulting in what they consider a ‘*longstanding epistemological and conceptual impasse in Childhood Studies*’ and so state that their work is intended to dislodge some of the ‘*foundational notions of the field*’ (Spyrou, Rosen & Cook, 2019:5). This work contributes to debates about the movement towards more global and critical to social-cultural studies of children and their childhoods (Spyrou, Rosen & Cook, 2019).

All the same, despite this contestation, these ideas are still at the heart of the discipline and the intention of this project is to work with James and Prout’s (1997) tenets 1, 2, 4 and 6 in forming the foundations of the Childhood Studies theoretical framework and with tenets 3 & 5 (positioned within the Methodology chapter) as fundamental aspects of researching with children and young people. I would argue that this idea of grasping childhood as a ‘social fabrication’ informed by history, politics, culture, and geography is no less relevant now than when it first emerged.

2.2.2 The Social Construction of Childhood: Constructions Relevant to this Study.

To look more closely at the theoretical underpinnings of the social construction of childhood, I briefly turn to the work of sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman (1967) that considers the ‘*social construction of reality*.’ This challenges a notion of taken-for-granted reality, instead seeing it as

negotiated in *'everyday life through the interactions people have with one another'* and the sets of discourses and environments with which they live, including the cultural, natural, and material world (James & James, 2012:122). This sociological perspective argues that what might be called reality involves a process of interpretation regarding how meaning is created and recreated, resulting in a shared understanding that affects interactions between individuals. Therefore, interaction and behaviour are framed through societal shared meanings attached to specific objects and concepts. From this perspective, people live in both natural and symbolic environments, and are constantly *'involved in the ongoing making of everyday life through their actions'*. These concepts contributed to the new paradigm of childhood (James & Prout, 1997), with its roots in a *'symbolic interactionist paradigm'* (Denzin, 1992:1), so forming a frame of reference or framework to understand how societal practices are maintained and created through the interactions between individuals (James & James, 2012:115). This is related, in turn, specifically to the social construction of childhood for, as James and Prout, (1997:214) contend, childhood or childhoods need to be perceived as *'a shifting social and historical construction [...] a continually experienced and created social phenomenon which has significance for its present, as well as the past and future.'*

The importance of this theoretical perspective for the development of Childhood Studies cannot be underestimated. It offered a new response to the ontological question *'what is a child?'* challenging ideas of childhood as a universal phenomenon (Spyrou et al., 2019). Understanding childhood as socially constructed allows analysis of the ways childhood and children are represented in art, media and other discourses in different societies and, additionally, how these constructs impact on the everyday experiences of children (James & James, 2012:123; Woodhead, 2015). Additionally, James and Prout's (1997:8-9) argument that childhood needs to be considered in relation to class, gender, or ethnicity implies an intersectional approach which has implications when considering childhood in specific contexts.

At this point, I want to explore some dominant discourses and social constructions of childhood that are interlinked (Mills, 2003:9), see Figure 2 below. They are flagged up because they feature in parent, carer, professional and policy understandings of childhood and so appear throughout this thesis as a backdrop to the work with the child participants.

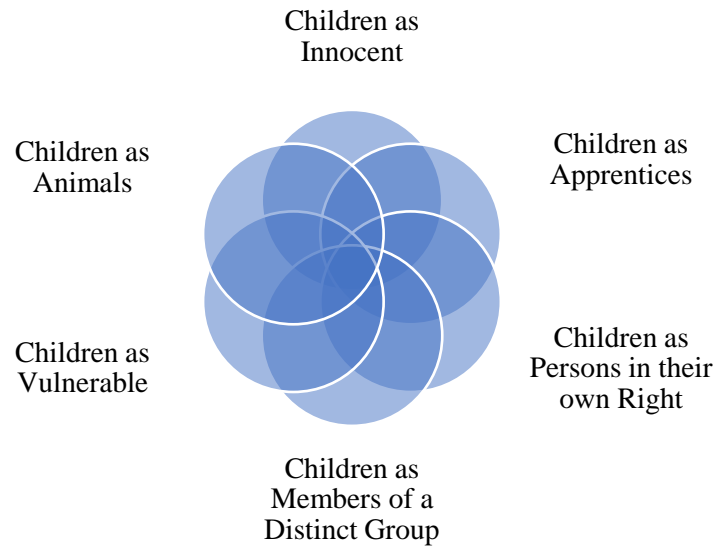


Figure 2. Constructs of Childhood (Mills, 2003:9)

To begin, the discourse of innocence has still got a powerful hold on the imagination of Western societies, as Mills (2003) points out. Whilst this view of childhood was not necessarily directly expressed by adult participants in the research, they had an impact on adult understandings of children’s capabilities and behaviour that meant the idea of childhood, or children, as potentially agentic was secondary. The child as innocent emerges from a combination of perspectives including ‘*child as a theological construct*,’ ‘*the child as being in need of protection*’ and ‘*the child as a force for good*’ (Mills, 2003:10).

The former, the child as a theological construct, is dominated by two contrasting viewpoints that are both derived from Christian thought as understood in Western societies. The first stresses the ‘*devilish, potentially evil, self-willed nature*’ of the child, (Mills, 2003:10) as expressed in the Puritanical perspective, conceived during the sixteenth century, that argued that children are born with innate original sin, something which can be addressed using strict discipline and education on the part of adults to ‘*inculcate morality and good behaviour*’ (Gittins, 2015:40; Mills, 2003). This, in turn, links to the idea of childhood as animals/animalistic and in need of ‘taming’. Indeed, there are contemporary examples of educators expressing such ideas, as exemplified by Katharine Birbalsingh’s approach at Michaela Community School as it appeared in the media in relation to her comments about original sin and the need to teach children to be good (Davis, 2021).

The oppositional theological viewpoint, first endorsed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stresses the ‘*angelic, unsullied, natural goodness of children*’ (Mills, 2003:10) aligned to notions of purity, innocence, and the child as part of the natural world. This is typically seen as originating in the work of Rousseau (1762) (Mills, 2003). Rousseau inverted the idea of infant original sin and declared

adulthood to be corrupt and corrupting, arguing that *'the social world is a sad decline from natural innocence'* (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:39). This view is further exemplified by his argument that *'God (Nature in my view) makes all things good; man meddles with them, and they become evil'* (Rousseau, 2018: Book 1)⁴. The impact of his work on popular understandings of childhood and some research has resulted in the perceived notion of innocence, and consequently the assumed need to shield children from the adult world, becoming a dominant construction of childhood today.

Another aspect of Rousseau's thinking relevant to this study is his hostile view of reading and books. This was about preserving innocence and controlling the child's intellectual development. This view of reading as potentially undermining innocence, or otherwise dangerous, remains a dominant discourse around that practice, a point I shall return to. It is also suggestive of later media effects and censorship arguments around the more modern technologies that children may access. His argument was that *'Reading is the plague of childhood and almost the only occupation we know how to give it'* (Rousseau, 2018: Book 1). This, he said was because the *'child who reads does not think, he only reads; he is not informing himself, he learns words'*, and this hostility, ironically expressed in a book, means that the fictional innocent pupil Emile is to have *'No book other than the world, no instruction other than fact'* garnered through his own senses and observation (Rousseau, 2018: Book 1). Linked to this concept of innocence, then, is the idea of children as vulnerable; physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and so potentially influenced by what they encounter in texts of whatever kind (See Figure 2). This in turn leads to an emphasis on the need for protection, along with a construction of childhood as about dependency which, has and, is frequently used *'to naturalise a lack of autonomy'* (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:36).

Early childhood, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is often associated with the need for physical protection and nurture to ensure wellbeing (Mills, 2003:12). However, protection often refers specifically to the preservation of *'innocence'* which can perhaps also be read as *'a state of ignorance'* with adults deciding which aspects of adult life need to be kept secret from children and when (and if) to reveal them (Mills, 2003:10). Thus, the movement from childhood into adulthood can be seen as about the gradual acquiring of adult secrets or secret knowledge. This gradual process may contrast with that of other societies and cultures where the transition from childhood to adulthood is an act of sudden ritualised initiation (Mills, 2003; Pressler, 2010). However, both versions see adulthood as significant because of knowledge, whilst childhood's value comes from a lack of it, in effect creating

⁴ I have used the Project Gutenberg EBook of Emile which has no page numbers <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5427/5427-h/5427-h.htm> (Accessed: July 2022)

a deficit model, something this study's acknowledgement of children's knowledge is partly aimed to counter.

The final perspective relating to 'innocence' is that of the '*child as a force for good in the world*' (Mills, 2003:11). This is linked to notions of futurity and hope on the part of adults. Such an approach may be seen as failing to appreciate children as people now, rather than later. In effect this passes responsibility for the world on to children, whilst simultaneously denying them the actual power to make effective changes because their perceived innocence should be protected. This symbolic function of childhood creates a double bind of reciprocally conflicting messages that prevents those receiving the messages to resolve the underlying dilemma. This means that innocence, as a social construction of childhood, often frames the child as powerless, naïve, not yet knowing (De Castro, 2004:469) and vulnerable, whilst also assuming that they will be able to resolve issues that previous generations have failed to.

Although these complex ideas about innocence were dominant for some time, by the late twentieth century a narrative about the loss of innocence, aligned closely with the concept of the loss of childhood more generally, was increasingly noted in critical and popular debate (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:40). In some ways this can be seen as building on Rousseau's notion of the adult world as corrupting. Indeed, many critics, including Sue Palmer (2007), suggest that this potential loss of innocence is due to children's modern lifestyles, with stress, high stakes testing cultures (so again relating to education) and the commercialisation of childhood threatening what Sánchez-Eppler (2011:41) described as '*the sacred pastoral of childhood.*' It has also been argued that access to contemporary media, from television onwards, has revealed adult secrets to children, again seen as resulting in a loss of innocence (Postman, 1994). That technology both old and new, from books to social media, allows exploration of and access to the worlds of others (Owen, 2017), and yet is seen as problematic, is also explored more later.

To move on to other elements in Figure 2, the notion of '*children as apprentices*' has roots in industrial practices where children underwent '*transmission-type learning*' for several years to acquire practical skills working alongside an older mentor with a view to step into the shoes of the mentor in the future (Mills, 2003:19). This role made little or no demands on the child to use their initiative or imagination and was viewed as a time of socialisation and acculturation. This construct is associated with the work of John Locke (1690) whose depiction of the child as blank slate (Tabula Rasa), defined as not yet tainted with sin, has been interpreted as the child simply waiting to '*be inscribed by experience, presenting childhood in a manner both more benign and passive*' (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:39). This

idea of childhood is often seen as a *'paeon of malleability'* and is used as justification of adult authority (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:39) with the child being perceived as an adult in the becoming and, again, not yet a person.

Another view of childhood significant to this study is *'children as members of a distinct group'*, that is perceived as separate from adulthood, a model embedded in some educational practices and aspects of traditional developmental discourse. The idea of the school as an institution for children is, in part, based on this construction. The imposition of the labels child or childhood can, according to Mills (2003:23), have the same effect as any *'stereotyping device'* in that it homogenises that group and so discourages further thought about the individuals that are seen to occupy it. According to Mills (2003:23) this raises significant tensions as it assumes that *'certain people, of a certain age, in a certain context, do share certain experiences and may legitimately be thought to inhabit, at least partially, similar worlds.'* Whilst this idea makes it possible to talk about childhood, it is at a cost, given that it undermines notions of children being individuals.

The final construction of childhood in Figure 2 that is relevant to this study is the idea of *'children as persons in their own right.'* Along with the dominant constructions discussed above, this too is important as part of the framing for this research project. This construct views childhood as having unique, individual features, stressing the value of every child – both when they are a child and as *'an emergent adult'* (Mills, 2003:21). This construction of childhood sits with the rights-based discourse of childhood whilst also linking to concepts of agency, social actors, competency and age. Here children are able and willing to make decisions and their opinions and experiences are valued and relevant. This is suggestive of the way that the boundaries may be blurred in the dichotomised and oppositional relationship between adulthood and childhood (Prout, 2005:10) so emphasising *'children as becoming and children as beings'* (Prout, 2005:66).

Finally, to move away from Figure 2, other constructions have emerged more recently, many of which are based on the earlier models included above. Alex Owen provides a concise overview of some of the labels attached to contemporary childhoods, including the *'Cotton Wool Child, Selfish Child, Universal Child, Sen/D Child, Regulated Child, and the Stressed Child,'* (2017:7). These are argued to be created by changes in the *'social atmosphere'* (Owen, 2017:2) that children inhabit. Discussing these constructions, Owen (2017) starts from the position that they are often applied by adults to children in their formative years and so are significant in their understanding of themselves and the world. The author unpicks these ways of thinking about childhood and challenges them to ensure children are not limited by the parameters they set (Owen, 2017:9). In summary, Owen (2017:9)

contends that, *'by understanding and exploring, yet challenging when appropriate, pre-defined assumptions that are associated with a label, we can work towards the enrichment of the child's subjective experience of well-being.'* What I do in this research is look at constructions and labelling specifically in relation to reading, exploring how and where they appear and what implications they have for children and settings, so applying key ideas from the discipline in a relatively unfamiliar context.

2.2.3 Childhood: How Rights Based Discourses May Influence Work with Children

The concept of children as active contributors and constructors of their own experiences and lives, as seen in James and Prout's (1997) tenets, is at the heart of the rights-based discourse informing this research. Globally the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1989) based on UNICEF's work presents a complete statement and legislative pledge of *'children's rights and is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history'* (UNICEF, 2019; Kellett, 2011). The UNCRC is, as Kellett (2011:2) argues, the most *'complete statement of children's rights produced to date and has 41 substantive articles'* focussed solely on the child irrespective of gender, religion or social origin. The Convention comprises of Articles grouped into what is known as the three Ps – Protection, Provision and Participation (UNICEF, 2019). There are two fundamental approaches to children's rights expressed here, those being moral and legal rights. The latter are rights that a person has under law (often defined as *'positive'* rights) and the former rights that can be *'justified'* by a moral theory (Archard, 2015:57). Many rights, of course, can be seen as both moral and legal (Archard, 2015).

Global perceptions of the status of children were intended to be altered by the treaty's implementation as it was designed to *'change the way children are viewed and treated, i.e., as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity'* (UNICEF, 2019). David Archard (2015) contends that the rights of children to participation, autonomy and self-determination as articulated in Article 12 of the UNCRC, are consequently at the heart of children's liberation. Further, what underpins the legislative pledge is the desire to work towards the *'acceptance that children are agents in their own right, not adults in waiting'* (Kellett, 2011:2), linked to Prout's comments about children as people now (2005).

This international treaty created a new impetus for communities to find more effective ways of engaging with children and young people in terms of listening to their lived experiences, which involved improving adult listening and communication skills and creating opportunities for consultation that include children and young people as active participants in the many decisions and

matters affecting them (Kellett, 2011; Sinclair, 2006). In terms of raising the profile of children's rights all the Articles are valuable, but in this research, I particularly engage with Articles Twelve and Thirteen (see below), which are the most significant innovations in the conceptualisation of children aligned to the child's right to participate (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014:66).

Article 12.1

State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 12.2

For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law

Article 13.1

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Article 13.2

The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (order public), or of public health or morals.

(UNCRC, UNICEF, 2019).

This rights discourse aligns with a discourse of participation, although it needs to be noted here the term participation does not appear in these Articles, however this discourse involves a shift in thinking in terms of children and young people's opportunities to participate and exercise agency, now considered a key focus of the discipline and defined by Allison and Adrian James (2012:9) as the 'ability and capacity for an individual to act independently.' Although implicit in James and Prout's (1997) tenets, awareness and analysis of children's rights has become a key indicator for many cultures and societies and is fundamental to any research agenda that intends to work with children and young people.

2.2.4 Childhood Participation & Engagement

In the general sense, participation can be defined as the process of sharing decisions which may affect an individual's life and the community in which they live (Hart, 1992:5). It is argued to be the cornerstone on which democracy is created, whilst also being a standard that democracies are measured against (Hart, 1992). Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship, germane to '*political, institutional, and research-related agendas*' (Wyness, 2018:112). Accordingly, participation is at the heart of the conceptual framework of this research project and fundamental to the ways in which I perceive engagement.

There has been something of a shift in thinking about childhood. Discourses and constructions of innocence, vulnerability, naivety, and the need to protect children from the adult world have become less prominent and thinking about childhood as agentic and children as '*active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live*' (James & Prout, 1997:8), notions related to the rights-based discourse, have become more dominant. The latter tend to militate against the notion of childhood as '*passive subjects of social structures and processes*' (James & James, 2012:115). Of course, all these constructions mingle and exist in tension in everyday life, but the ideas about rights and agency have been given more emphasis all the same.

The notions of children as having rights and being agentic social actors in this project, largely addresses the experiences of young children in two key institutional spaces, the home and educational setting. Listening to the voices of nursery and reception age children and discussing and recording their personal narratives about their reading journeys as it appears in all aspects of their lives means that this research reflects James and Prout's (1997:8) tenet that argues that '*children's social relationships and cultures [...are...] worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.*' In addition, in support of this, they go on to suggest that an ethnographic methodological approach is perhaps the most useful way to study childhood and in particular capture children's direct voice and participation in research projects, as will be discussed further in the Methodology chapter. I realised that capturing children's everyday experiences of reading and their reading journeys would be, as Cremin argues, '*enhanced through sustained conversations about texts in and through networks of social relations*' (2014:157) conversations that could only be achieved, from my perspective, in the educational setting, a realisation that proved to be important in terms of participation.

Of course, the concept of children participating and having a voice in society or research is subject to '*strongly divergent opinion*' (Hart, 1992:5). This can even be seen in the UNCRC (1989) Articles when they advocate that children should be able to express their views freely in all matters that affect them. However, there is a proviso or limitation which is that these views are '*given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*' (UNCRC, 1989) This element leaves the interpretation of maturity to adults in terms of children's competency and capability. Roger Hart (1992:5) reflects on some of the divergent opinions about children's participation and suggests that many might see the notion of children being competent and capable as naïve and that some would argue that children do not have the '*decision-making power of adults,*' again showing the impact of cultural constructions of childhood. Further he suggests that others would see children as in need of protection from the harsh realities of societal problems and argue that they should be allowed to have '*carefree childhoods,*' (Hart, 1992:5) again referring to the complex notions of innocence noted above.

Whilst awareness and understanding of the idea of participation clearly varies, another issue is raised by Mary Kellett (2011), who expresses concern that although political and legislative frameworks are in place to ensure participation is happening, this is often at a tokenistic level. Whilst adults within these processes can and do consult children and young people, Kellett (2011) argues that they frequently choose to ignore their experiences resulting in children being excluded from decision-making. Such challenges have prompted a more focused emphasis on the need for '*active participation of children and young people in decision-making processes*', in line with Hart (1992:5) who stated that fundamental purpose of involving children in decision-making was that they gradually learnt skills, confidence, competence and gained an understanding of democratic participation through practice.

2.2.5 Meaning of Children's Participation

To further explore participation, I turn again to Hart (1992), who wrote a paper for UNICEF entitled *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* and developed a model for participation, *The Ladder of Children's Participation* based on Sherry Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* which addressed citizen contributions to planning processes in the United States of America. Hart's model was the first substantial attempt to quantify ideas and concepts of participation regarding children and is still used today.

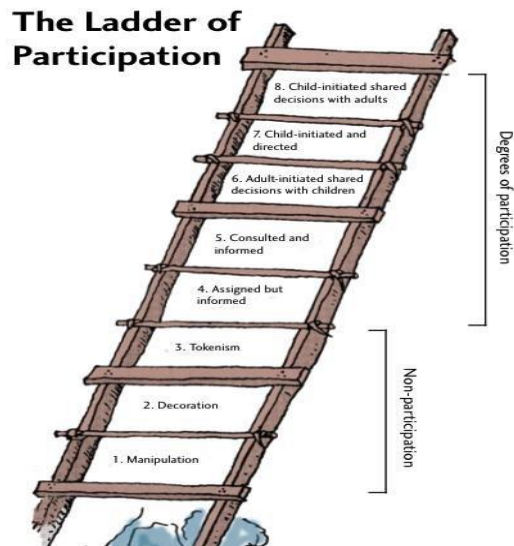


Figure 3. Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992)

Hart's (1992) model outlines eight levels of participation with the first three rungs referring to what he suggests is non-participation consisting of '*manipulation, decoration and tokenism*', concepts later returned to by Kellett (2011). The remaining rungs of the ladder outline varying degrees of participation moving from partial to more complete participation. This is depicted as happening in stages, the first being '*assigned but informed*' followed by '*consulted and informed, adult-initiated shared decisions with children, child initiated and directed,*' before arriving at the final top rung which Hart describes as '*child-initiated shared decisions with adults.*' For many, Harts' ladder of participation was perceived as a powerful evaluative tool although it was also criticised as lacking cultural context as an important and significant determinant (Treseder, 1997; Pidmore, 1998 in Kellett, 2011). There has, additionally, been criticism of the implicitly sequential nature of the model arguing that it implies hierarchical values (Reddy & Ratna, 2002; Hart, 2008).

Subsequently, similar models have been developed to highlight aspects of participation, adapted from Hart's model, that offer different ways of considering equal participation in less linear or implicitly sequential ways. One such model is Harry Shier's *Pathways to Participation* (2001) which focuses less on the status of the children and more on the adults' roles (Kellett, 2011). Like Hart's model of participation, Shier's (2001:110) pathway maps participation from the lowest level ('*children are listened to*') to the highest ('*children share power and responsibility for decision making*') with five levels designed to create a framework for participation.

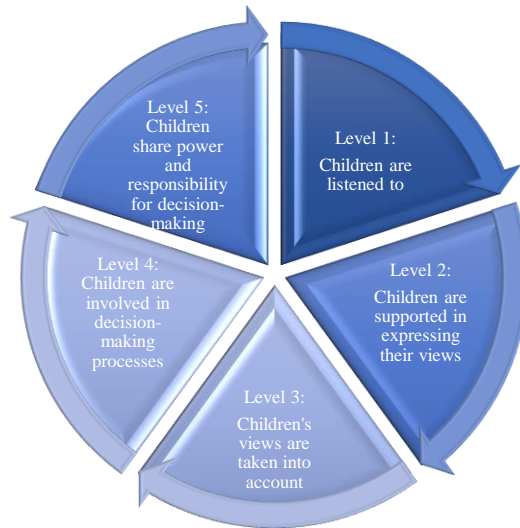


Figure 4 Pathways to Participation (Shier, 2001)

This model is predicated on adult enablers who afford children the opportunities or processes to express their views. Like Hart's, Shier's model also has implications for hierarchal values. However, as shown in Figure 4, which suggests it should be thought of as cyclical and iterative, this model fits more comfortably with the conceptual framework of this research project, illustrating and reflecting the varying degrees of participation. Shier's model (2001:110) frames questions for adults to consider in terms of planning and evaluating participatory projects framed around 'openings,' 'opportunities' and 'obligations', see Figure 5 below.

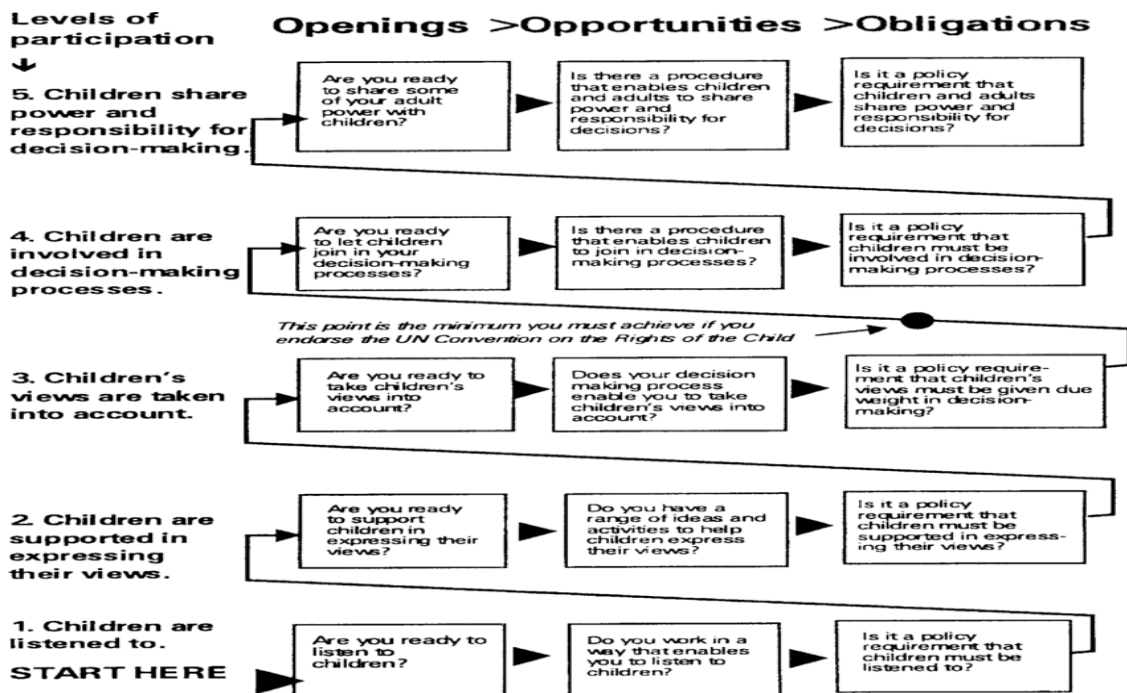


Figure 5. Openings, Opportunities & Obligations (Shier, 2001:110)

For this research, understanding levels and models of participation has been vital. However, on reflection I do not feel that I achieved what I had hoped when embarking on this project which was including all five levels in all aspects of the research. As the research progressed it became apparent that, although I think I achieved the first three levels and the fourth to some extent, I failed to achieve the fifth level where the child participants would have shared power and responsibility for all decisions. This was because although I consulted with the children when in the setting, many of the research decisions had already been made outside of the setting without consultation, in line with the needs of the university ethics process. Therefore, it would be wrong to suggest this project successfully reached the highest levels of participation, although I did make attempts to involve the children in as many aspects of the broader project as possible. In response to this perception, I eventually developed a publishing mini project with the children where they were involved at every stage. I reflect upon this and other aspects of the research in the final chapter when I consider what I would do differently if starting anew.

2.2.6 Childhood: Concepts of Agency, Voice & Power

Essentially, agency has an affinity with children's rights and the UNCRC (1989) as a policy and practice agenda. It is argued that if children were able to be more agentic their individual opinions and views would be considered more worthy of respect, so further establishing their human rights. With this view, agency tends to emphasise children's ability to have control over the direction of their own lives, which is directly aligned to Article 12.1 (UNCRC, 1989). In turn, having agency implies that children could inform and initiate changes in society more widely. However, this needs to be accepted by adults in more than a tokenistic way, as all too often children's agency is '*glossed over, taken to be an essential, virtually unmediated characteristic of humans that does not require explanation*' (Prout, 2005:64-65). In part this can be seen as originating from the fact that traditionally agency is afforded by adults to children and so to address this, as James and James argue, '*it is important to consider the different ways in which children's agency might be conceptualized*' (2012:10). Driven by the notion of agency, I ensured that the children were active participants in this project, which is indicated in the way that their voices are to the fore in the later chapters. In taking an ethnographic approach and using a range of ways to elicit responses, I hope to demonstrate that I made efforts to move towards enabling the children's voices and agency as far as the nature of doctoral study allows, although I remain aware that I too am an adult affording agency to children.

Over the past twenty years in professional and academic contexts the voice of the child has been prioritised in certain contexts, disciplines, and in relation to specific agenda. However, whilst there is

a recognition of the value, function, and role of children's voices, there is still a disparity between recognising the value of children's voices and listening to them. Inevitably, incorporating children's voices in this research created both methodological and theoretical questions, including how to evaluate levels of children's involvement, engagement, and participation, as well as interpreting and deconstructing the '*various terms used relating to children's perspectives, including consultation, participation, voice, and listening*' (Coleyshaw et al., 2010:9). The importance of this, Kellett (2011:1) reminds us, is that children view their own worlds '*with different eyes and have different priorities and concerns*' to adults. This demands effective listening to ensure adults hear '*children guiding us into their worlds*' (Kellett, 2011:1). Consequently, communicating with children requires similar approaches to engagement with adults however also quite different (Kellett, 2011). Listening, for instance, is quite different to the act of hearing, which is about physically processing sound. Therefore, listening, hearing, and researching with children is predicated on notion of children being more active in the research process. These ideas lead researchers to focus on methodological and ethical debates and are related to a strong desire to support children to communicate their understandings and experiences in meaningful ways. To this end I deployed a range of representational forms in the research as will be discussed in the Methodology chapter (Christensen & James, 2017; Mason & Danby, 2011).

2.3 Children's Literature

Those of us who are passionate about reading know that it has enriched our lives. Fiction helps create and develop that inner world of the imagination where we can play with ideas and possibilities (Mallet, 2020: n.p.).

This section of the Literature Review offers an overview of academic work on children's literature and shows how, like Childhood Studies, it is in part concerned with definitions of the child, in this case in relation to reading, as well as children's books and notions of literacy. Broadly speaking the discipline of Children's Literature incorporates studies for all kinds of writing for children and their audiences⁵. Prue Goodwin (2008:3) points out that seeing children's literature as a homogenous group of texts, is both '*confusing and incorrect*.' She suggests that the array of genres, subject matters, literary quality, and illustrative style is just as diverse in literature published for children as it is in that for adults. In terms of fiction the scope includes a number of formats and genres including picturebooks, traditional tales, plays, filmscripts, poetry, novels and graphic novels (Mallett, 2020). In addition, the academic literature also addresses what Margaret Mallett (2020) describes as non-fiction or '*informational texts*,' books which were described by (Meek, 2008 quote taken from the *Write Away Conference* cited in Mallett, 2020:24) as '*children's nonfiction literature*.' These two types of text differ in that nonfiction texts, whilst they can be entertaining, innovative, and involving, are designed primarily with an informational purpose in mind⁶.

The focus of this research, however, is not to analyse the distinctions between differing literary formats or use literary studies approaches to analyse specific texts, although notions of genre and medium are employed in the thesis. Instead, it primarily focuses on how books are used and understood by children, as well as exploring their role and value in children's lives and cultural assumptions about literacy. Immediately this points to a crossover with educational and audience research, indicating the inter and multidisciplinary nature of Children's Literature as a discipline. This focus also ties back into questions around the function and value of children's literature and reading. For example, Mallett (2020) argues that the purpose and value of books and reading is '*about making readers*' rather than teaching reading. This key distinction flags up two different perspectives on the role and value of reading, firstly the '*standards agenda*' and secondly the '*wider reading agenda*', as outlined by Cremin (2011:4). This

⁵ Although the project tends to focus on fiction, throughout this thesis the term children's literature will be used when discussing both fiction and nonfiction, whilst Children's Literature, with capital letters, refers to the discipline.

⁶ Non-fiction material tends to be less focused upon in the discipline, although many scholars have traced the origins and tracked the progress of the development of books dedicated to childhood covering both, including Matthew Grenby and Kimberley Reynolds.

distinction is important in terms of the aims and objectives of this project, as it is not about how reading is taught, but rather how children navigate their own routes to becoming readers. Part of understanding this navigation involves looking at which books children choose to read, so identifying children's reading preferences. Consequently, ideas and concepts will be adopted from the discipline of Children's Literature to support discussion about the concepts of reading, reading for pleasure, storytelling, and authorship.

Further, regarding authorship, this research project starts to engage with children as authors, or perhaps '*modern scriptors*' as Barthes (1977:145) suggested, who pull together pre-existing material to create new narratives. In this I was also influenced by Maria Nikolajeva (2009:5) who pondered whether one day the term children's literature would be reserved for *literature by children* – like children's cultures that include their own stories, drawings, and play. This is even though today, very '*few children write the literature published professionally as children's literature*' (Nodelman, 2008:3), with the authorship of children's literature remaining firmly with adulthood (Tesar et al., 2016; Nikolajeva, 2009).

A further aspect of children's literature and media, which appears in some research and popular accounts of childhood reading, such as that by Francis Spufford (2002), engages with memory, and even nostalgia. In this project, the readers are very young, but this does not mean that they do not already have reading histories and memories of sharing texts, counter to some discourses, like the child as blank slate. Indeed, the Scrapbooks were intended to elicit such memories which were then shared as stories. Thinking about children's books typically conjures up early memories of enjoying, collecting and often sharing stories and favourite books, as well as memories of reading with parents, siblings, and professionals (Chambers, 1991). These memories intersect with constructions of childhood, additionally combining with people's views of themselves as child readers and notions of the implied reader as constructed within children's books.

Finally, the project engages with the emotions surrounding reading, as simply the use of the term 'reading for pleasure' indicates. This too has been discussed in the discipline, again often in the intersections between Children's Literature and Education. It is part of the foundational literature of the discipline, for as Meek states, the pleasure of being immersed in a story, hearing about the adventures of others, and feeling like you are sharing secrets with the author can be a transformative experience and such experiences, from an early age, can support developing readers to think about the ways in which the '*network of words that mean more than they say*' appear in the stories that they choose (1988:24).

2.3.1 Historical Perspectives on Children's Books

Adults have been writing for children for many centuries, although it is difficult to pinpoint when the use of term children's literature became commonplace. Historical research around children's books explores both the form of the material, the function it had, and what constructions of the child reader they imply. For instance, in the medieval period children were taught to read using a wooden tablet covered in parchment containing the alphabet and a basic prayer (typically the Pater Noster) (Broomhall et al., 2017). This material was primarily designed and concerned with the child's moral and spiritual progress (Broomhall et al., 2017) whilst informing and suggesting '*ways of acting and behaving*' (Kelley, 2007:31). Later 'moral' tales and instructional texts were also designed to have an impact upon children's manners or morals or both and became a form of enculturation (Hoffman, 2010:248). These published texts are described by Broomhall et al. (2017) as a '*body of conduct literature*,' with a target audience of wealthy children and adolescents.

The intention here might be seen today as overly didactic but reflects dominant historical constructions of childhood, particularly the idea of the child as a blank slate, or the child as having original sin and so needing discipline and education to become a moral person, as well as a dominant view about what reading was for. For instance, one famous text published in 1530 and written by Desiderius Erasmus was entitled *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* which can be translated as *On the Civility of Children's Behaviour*. This short text aimed at children and young people was intended to train them in manners and is considered the first text in Western Europe published on the moral and practical education of children. It proved to be a popular book, going into one hundred and thirty editions over three hundred years and being translated into twenty-two languages. Thus, books for children, constructions of childhood, and education are intertwined from their earliest appearances, which suggests that a similar overlap in later discourses and disciplines could be anticipated.

Writers and scholars such as John Locke talked about the ways in which learning needed to appeal to children and clearly indicated that children needed time for play and imagination (Broomhall et al., 2017). However, literature for children published at this time was designed specifically for spiritual improvement, building on what had come before (Broomhall et al., 2017). Such publications were aligned to the traditions of the Puritans, with an explicit and direct dissemination of ideology and a specific focus on religious doctrine, beliefs, morals, and manners (Grenby, 2014; Kelley, 2007). Many of these texts contained stories of virtuous lives and deaths of worthy children, thus schooling readers into models of behaviour (Broomhall et al., 2017; Sánchez-Eppler, 2011). These constructions of

childhood, as represented in literature, are argued by Sánchez-Eppler (2011:35) to be '*repeatedly made and remade in stories told to children*', and hence became dominant discourses. Such accounts also highlighted sins committed by children such as idleness, disobedience, boisterousness and neglecting the Sabbath and offered salvation through opportunities to renounce wickedness (Grenby, 2014).

The development of books for children rooted in instruction, control and moralistic education is directly linked to puritanical constructions of childhood as in need of regulation and discipline. In addition, the view that children are blank slates means that they are susceptible to the influence of any given medium including books intended for children. As reading is a key part of children's formative education then the content of what children read becomes of interest to adult society because of constructions of the child as easily influenced. This idea remains prevalent today and is influential in campaigns about suitability which may serve to censor or remove material from library or school settings, as well as in the individual decisions by practitioners and parents about what they consider appropriate for child readers.

2.3.2 Books Designed for Children

The type of instructional literature discussed above was designed for children by adults with a clear focus on morals, routines and learning for future roles rather than entertainment and pleasure in the now. However, this is not to say that the stories were not entertaining, as they contained interesting characters, featured clever layouts and often had attractive illustrations (Grenby, 2014). Children would also, at the time, have access to fables and fairy stories as well as '*affordable pamphlet tales and ballads called chapbooks*' (Grenby, 2014: n.p.) but again these were not specifically designed or published for children. Books published especially for children during the beginning to the mid-eighteenth century continued the older tradition in that they were mostly instructional texts such as schoolbooks, spelling and conduct books (Grenby, 2014). These points about the function of reading and content of books in the past are useful to this research in that some of the ideas, attitudes and assumptions are still played out in understandings of children's books today.

It is argued that it was only towards the end of the eighteenth century with changes in printing technology and in education, that the publication of children's books became commercially viable. After that this flourishing new market took a share of the publishing industry in Britain (Grenby, 2014; Sánchez-Eppler, 2011) with John Newbery coming to be known as '*the father of children's literature.*' Texts like Newbery's (1744) *A Little Pretty Pocket-book*, combined several forms in one publication by including poetry and fables and mentioning fairy tale characters, alongside gendered instructions on manners and amusement (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004). Whilst still asserting that the function is

moral, such texts start to incorporate reading material intended to be as pleasurable as it is informative and can be seen as enticement. To heighten this enticement animals displaying *'human characteristics began to appear in children's books'* (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004:208). This anthropomorphism continues in publishing for children today, especially in picturebooks and fairy tales, and was an important aspect of the children's discussion of books and their creation of one, as later chapters reveal.

This new type of book was linked with shifts in the understanding of childhood. For example, Newbery (1744) included girls as potential readers. However, at a more fundamental level, the growth of the production of literature designed for children depended on a new conception of childhood (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:37) in which *'children's tastes and skills as readers would differ enough from that of adults to warrant separate publications.'* This idea of the child as having specific qualities also ties to constructs like Locke and Rousseau's disruption of the puritanical construction of childhood, which according to Sánchez-Eppler (2011:39) forged an explicitly new set of goals for children's literature, once more showing the links between the academic disciplines of Children's Literature and Childhood Studies. The growth of publishing for children was also based on an assumption that enough parents would be interested in pleasing and instructing their children to make such a specialised line profitable (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:37). This idea of publishing for the child reader, according to Sánchez-Eppler (2011:37), reveals a great deal about the evolution of the idea of childhood. The competing constructions of childhood mentioned earlier influenced content, views of the reader and the function of reading, but also seeded future expectations and assumptions about the appropriateness of material deemed suitable for children, *'ranging from didactic to playful'* (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:39).

2.3.3 Picturebooks

A growth area in literature designed specifically for children has been the development of picturebooks, a relatively recent invention (Lewis, 2001). There are several differing versions and spellings of the term, including picture books and picture-books, however the compound word picturebook recognises and celebrates the composite text with the union of art and text in telling a story (Marantz, 1977; Lewis 2001; Mallett, 2020) and so I adopt that term in this thesis. This was the type of material that the child participants in this research were most familiar with, hence I speak a little about their development and characteristics here.

Picturebooks began to appear at the end of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that picturebooks became as we now know them (Lewis, 2001). The form and nature of picturebooks as an object or artefact became a focus of academic study, especially in the 1980s and onwards, with major works written by Perry Nodelman and Joseph Schwarz. Prior to this a

key piece of research was produced by Barbara Bader in the late 1970s, that being a large-scale historical survey of picturebooks in the United States of America. She highlighted the work of both authors and illustrators prior to and during the twentieth century and outlined her own definition of a picturebook in terms which emphasised their complexity, arguing that,

a picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a [reader / beholder]. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. On its own terms the possibilities are limitless (Bader, 1976:1).

Bader's work influenced research that followed in her consideration of picturebooks as text, illustration, and an experience for the reader, as well as regarding the social and cultural aspects of the form. My understanding of the value and potential of picturebooks for children is influenced by idea of the book as an experience for the reader (as will be seen in the final chapters). Her work is also helpful in relation to how these books work, something I explored with the child participants. Picturebooks, according to Roberta Seelinger Trites (1994:225) are '*visual manifold narratives*' that rely on more than one set of images, with the structure of the story unfolding by '*means of multiple planes of signification that recur on the majority of the book's pages*' (Trites, 1994:225). Here too the emphasis on complexity helps to set the tone when talking about and exploring the children's experiences of engaging with picturebooks.

There is a substantial body of academic literature that analyses and critiques picturebooks and their composition, nature, and form. Researchers include Margaret Meek, Peter Hollindale, Peter Hunt, Kim Reynolds, Jane Doonan, Elaine Moss, Maria Nikolajeva and many more. Whilst this research project is mostly interested in what sense the children engage with and experience these texts, to have a grounding in the critical ways these books have been studied, especially regarding how they work, enabled me to support the child participants' exploration effectively and develop appropriate methodologies. Thus, I am indebted to researchers like Jane Doonan (1993:14), who make explicit that such texts are made from abstract elements and that the composition consists of several different kinds of interwoven elements, such as '*the scheme of colour, system of scale and intervals, a scheme of light and dark, an arrangement of shapes, an arrangement of small and large scale patterning and a network of linear rhythms*'.

In the academic literature about picturebooks, there is much interest, as Bader suggests above, in questions of both definition and audience. For example, Carol Driggs Wolfenbarger and Lawrence Sipe argue that they are, '*a unique visual and literary art form that engages young readers and older readers in many levels of learning and pleasure*' (2007:273). This point suggests multiple audiences for work in this form. This could be in terms of there being books published that are aimed at older readers as well as younger ones, or the way that a picturebook may address several audiences simultaneously, for instance, both adult and child. What this also does is emphasise complexity in terms of address and content.

In addition, complexity may also emerge from intertextuality where '*allusions to other texts are made within one text*' (Mallett, 2020:5). Intertextual references are commonplace in picturebooks. This implies that children are familiar with, or can develop a familiarity with, such references and can come to competently navigate these intricate networks of words and meanings. The implied reader and construction of childhood suggested by intertextuality, then, can deal with challenges. Intertext, which according to Meek (1988:24) appears to be a literary joke at surface level, has a serious function forming part of the '*whole intricate network of words which mean more than they say*' within these complex texts.

2.3.4 Readerly Texts

Barthes' argument that one can make a distinction between two types of texts aimed at adults may be usefully applied to children's picturebooks, how they are thought of and what kind of reader they imply. He argued that the two types of text corresponded with the distinction between with nineteenth century realism and twentieth century experimental modernism. This distinction was first presented in his work *S/Z* (1970) where Barthes attempted to '*free the reader from the constraints and limitations which academic institutions tend to impose on the 'consumption of literary texts,'*' focusing on the intention of the author (Barthes, 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631). '*Readerly texts,*' Barthes (1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631) argues represent a set of values which '*classical*' readers will seek, for instance '*linearity of the narrative, transparency of meaning and continuity of plot.*' The '*readerly text*' is described by Barthes as '*closed-off*' leaving little room for '*meaning-constructing practices*' (1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631). This model of readership positions the reader as a consumer of the author's product and passive in the process and in need of instruction, in effect, another version of the blank slate. Going further, he suggested that this type of text describes existing things and addresses cultural codes and conventions shared by the author and the reader and tends to align with classic narrative structures the reader can identify with.

Barthes' concepts of transparency and passivity can be applied to children's literature and reflects the role and perspectives on childhood of the author in developing texts specifically for children. Thus, if the author views the child reader as requiring instruction on how to behave, how to regulate their behaviour, or assumes the child is a blank slate, then they will be likely to create a more didactic text that leaves little to imagination, choice, or chance. These dominant versions/constructs of the implied child reader are also associated and aligned to the idea of child as innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection. This frames the child reader as needing protecting from harsh realities of life with little or no mention of taboo subjects such as death, loneliness etc.

This view is not uncommon and in some respect is dominant in terms of expectations of what children's book should be and do. It assumes a problematic common-sense or taken for granted account of children's books which assumes that they should have simple narratives with colourful pictures and covers and always conclude with a happy ending. This type of common-sense approach also tends to frame the implied child reader as not yet competent and lacking the ability to decipher and decode complex narratives, largely based on assumptions about a child's age and the capacities and skills associated with it.

2.3.5 Writerly Texts

In contrast, Barthes' '*writerly text*' is a more innovative and provocative text that does not always meet traditional expectations, is unconventional, and problematises the reality being described. Thus, the reader is no longer positioned as a consumer, but as a '*producer of text*' (Barthes, 1974:271) who is encouraged to resist the role of the passive and mechanistic reader reflected in the approach of '*readerly texts*.' '*Writerly texts*,' therefore, provoke the reader to produce a '*plurality of meanings which goes beyond the logical or psychological construction of the text*' (Barthes, 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631), calling into question and deconstructing literacy '*norms and conventions and unravelling the codes of literature to produce a sui generis, 'ideal' text*' (Barthes, 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631). The reader of these texts is required to actively participate in establishing meanings, reflecting Section 2.3.3. on the nature of reading picturebooks. Picturebooks for children like this could, for instance, be informed by intertextuality and a dissonance between image and word. In these texts Heffernan (2019:18) argues '*an image denotes an object that can be visualized in various ways as well as metaphorically construed*.' Such texts are aligned with more contemporary constructs or versions of the child reader closely linked with ideas of children as powerful, agentic, meaning makers with children's books created and designed to meet the demands of a reader that is intelligent, powerful and a sophisticated thinker (Burgess, 2004). To a certain extent, these texts require the reader

to *'interpret linguistic, virtual, auditory, spatial, and gestural semiotic systems'* that are favoured in more complex texts (Anstey & Bull, 2018:60). In this context, what are defined as good texts, therefore, make demands on readers to utilise their knowledge of events and objects beyond books to make sense of what they find within them.

Additionally, texts are *'not unilinear entities rather they are a heterogeneous combination of texts'*, designed to stimulate discussion in complex ways (Raj, 2015:77). Thus, the quality and complexity of the text is wholly dependent on how the author views or constructs the child reader and the differing versions or models of the implied child reader they create are constructed based on their views about children's capability and competence.

2.4 Education, Children’s Literature, and Reading Discourses

You can’t make someone read. Just as you can’t make them fall in love, or dream……

You can try, of course.

“Go on, love me!” “Dream!” “Read! “Read goddammit, I’m telling you to read!”

“Go to your room and read!”

What happens next?

Nothing.

(Pennac, 2006:1) [Pennac’s emphasis]

Meek (1988:21) contends that *‘the most important single lesson that children learn from texts is the nature and variety of written discourse, the different ways that language lets a writer tell and the many different ways a reader reads.’* This, in turn, suggests that the word reading may be contested and even politicized within the context of education and even in homes⁷.

At the heart of many contemporary political debates about reading is the idea of literacy or the lack thereof. Lack and deficit can be considered central terms, associated with fears and concerns about success at school and repercussions for later life. These concerns extend to social mobility and to the idea that if many lack literacy skills achieving a fairer society may be more difficult (National Literacy Trust, 2020). This serves to emphasise the importance that reading holds within British society, but also how fraught debates about literacy can be.

This part of the chapter, then, is concerned with exploring what is meant by the term reading as a subset of the disciplines of Education and Children’s Literature. It also includes a short detour into the governance of reading via government policy and directives, as these form the backdrop against which this research took place. Both disciplines can encompass how reading is taught in schools, but also the pleasures, or fears, that reading holds for children, and their engagement with books in their everyday reading lives (Cremin et al., 2014:1). Here reading is an emotive topic, something reflected in this study through the children’s and professionals’ personal routes into reading.

However, before exploring such perspectives on reading, I would briefly like to extend the comments about rights-based discourses in Childhood Studies to reading. In particular, I would like to refer to the work of Daniel Pennac (2006), who in *The Rights of the Reader* draws on his experiences as a

⁷ Words associated with reading such as literacy and literacies are often used interchangeably and will be explored in the following sections.

For clarity in this part of the thesis I will use the term *‘read’* or *‘reading’* unless I am referring to or citing other authors where I will respect their choice of terminology.

child, a parent and a teacher and reflects upon the power of story and how humans learn to read. He thinks about what helps and what gets in the way of reading, whilst reminding people of their '*right to read anything, anywhere, at any time, so long as we are enjoying ourselves*' (Pennac, 2006:145) and offers ten principal rights of reading as follows;

1. *The right not to read*
2. *The right to skip*
3. *The right not to finish a book*
4. *The right to read it again*
5. *The right to read anything*
6. *The right to mistake a book for real life*
7. *The right to read anywhere*
8. *The right to dip in*
9. *The right to read out loud*
10. *The right to be quiet*

These rights will be seen again in the final chapters to illustrate key points, as they resonate with the concepts of choice, decision making, and participation discussed earlier, so further locating this research. These concepts exist in tension with much of the thinking in policy and wider society about what reading is and the role the child plays in relation to it and reflect Pennac's rejection of aspects of the professional and national context of reading he emerged from as a child, and later a teacher, again emphasising how reading is political.

2.4.1 Literacies and the Social

Literacy at a surface level is defined by the National Literacy Trust Online (2020) as the '*ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world.*' Over the past four decades the academic area of literacy studies as a subset of Education and Children's Literature has contributed to the understanding of '*literacy as being ideologically and culturally situated*' (Schmidt, 2018:3). Studies suggest that literacy practices are complex and changeable rather than static and fixed (Barton et al., 2000; Street 1984, 1993). This relates to work by David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanic who asked for the consideration of a social view of literacy (See Figure 6). They outline how '*literacies are positioned in relation to social institutions and the power relations that sustain them*' (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:2), the importance of '*literacy practices*' as central to our '*social view of literacy*' and further expand upon these ideas with six propositions (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8).



Figure 6. Social View of Literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8)

Literacy practices are, therefore, what people do with literacy and the ways cultures utilise written language, which are often not visible or measurable units of behaviour (See Section 2.4.8), but instead are sets of beliefs, social relationships, values and attitudes. All are shaped by social rules that tend to regulate the use and distribution of texts and exist in relations between people in groups and communities. Further, Meek (1988:5) contributed to the idea of social view of literacy when she argued that although reading experts are familiar with *‘the reading process,’* they tend to *‘treat all text as the neutral substance on which the process works,’* often failing to recognise that *‘reading does not happen in a vacuum’* (Meek, 1988:6) or that social conditions and surroundings play a significant role in the reading process. These social conditions, surroundings and the ideas of literacy practices are significant to this project as the research context and literacy traditions associated with these contexts (home and school) are enmeshed in social and power relationships.

The more observable activities and tasks according to Barton and Hamilton (2000:8) can be described as *‘literacy events’* where literacy has a key role and is the focus of the event, and written texts are central to the activity. Keith Oatley (2003:161) usefully comments that reading and writing are often perceived as two separate events but state that most people combine the two, or *‘writeandread.’* For instance, when reviewing any text Oatley contends that the reader assimilates what is read with what they already know (2003:166). Other aspects of such events are the conversations about or around the

texts which are significant in terms of retelling, elaborating, or developing the story, or even making up stories. These events where children's early interest in literacy, encouraged through play, storytelling, songs, and rhymes, provide opportunities to discuss, retell, develop, and make up stories whilst talking about their own experiences and emotional responses (Rose, 2006).

Although the dominant discourse of reading is at the literal level, something which Chambers (1991:11) critiqued, arguing that being able to read is not merely about '*passing our eyes over printed words in order to decipher them,*' a consideration of what Becky Parry and Lucy Taylor (2018:103) describe as '*talking for pleasure*' means that storytelling can also be seen as an important '*literacy event*' (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8). Equally, reading at a visual level (visual literacy) is just as complex and important as reading words (Walsh, 2003), for as noted in Figure 6 there are different literacies associated with different domains of life. Every day, children access visual images to which they attach '*recognition and meaning*' (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007:274). These '*images signal meaning without requiring the accompanying verbal text*' (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007:274) and link to other visual media. Therefore, children learn to expect pictures to have '*personal and social meaning*' (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007:274). These visual skills of reading are vital for '*encouraging an active and even critical interpretation of textual and visual information*' (Arizpe & Styles, 2016:48).

Developing multiple literacies, including visual literacy, is important in terms of offering a useful counterbalance to the fixation and focus on more functional literacy skills which is often considered at the expense, according to Cathy Burnett and Guy Merchant (2018:62), of '*meaningful and empowering encounters with texts.*' The complex nature and relationship between '*reading, writing and talking for pleasure*' (Parry & Taylor, 2018:103) are described as threads, in what Shelby Wolf and Shirley Brice-Heath (1992:1) described as a '*braid of literacy woven together, each informing understanding of the other.*'

2.4.2 Reading: Education, Policy, and Schooling

Pauline Harris (2015) states that children are the group most affected by reading education practices and processes in schooling, yet their voices and perspectives are rarely sought. Literacy, in this sense, has long been a high priority for consecutive government agendas, both in Britain and globally. The political focus in Britain, especially England, has tended to result in an agenda about teaching reading that is competitive, and target driven. There is no doubt that reading is a lifelong skill that offers a variety of opportunities including learning, to be informed and to be entertained (Thorogood, 2021)

and that developing literacy is an ongoing iterative lifelong process, but it is also a politicised and policed activity. The Department for Education (DfE) contends that reading allows children to *‘acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know’* (DfE, 2014:3) with educators playing a key role in promoting and encouraging children to acquire these skills (CLPS, 2016). In the context of education there are many literacy events that are regular, *‘repeated activities linked into routine sequences and part of formal procedures and expectations of this social institution’* (Barton et al., 2000:9). In contrast, some literacy events are structured but have more informal expectations and pressures due to their location in the home and/or links with peer groups (Barton et al., 2000). Both formal and informal literacy events will be implicitly and explicitly referred to whilst discussing ideas about reading in terms of a comparative between two distinctive but complementary agenda, the Standards Agenda and Wider Reading Agenda (Cremin, 2011), which I return to shortly.

2.4.3 Statutory Governance of Reading

Policy, as a determinant (or policing) of formal literacy acquisition, has an impact, as suggested above, upon the teaching and learning strategies that children experience, and how their reading skills are evaluated and valued. The following sections therefore draw policy into this Literature Review to contextualise classroom practice. I am conscious, from reading various policy documents, that there is often a tension between how teachers, academics and those who drive policy see and understand literacy and reading. In addition, given that shifts in policy can have a swift impact on practice, policies may have a negative impact in terms of staff’s feelings about their skills, the demands made upon them, and their engagement.

This tension can be seen, for instance, in the National Strategies consecutive governments introduced between 1997 and 2011. Such strategies usually stated that they were intended to raise standards, which inherently suggests that standards at any given moment were low, so increasing pressure on teachers and schools. There were assertions that such strategies represented *‘one of the most ambitious change management programmes in education’* (DfE, 2011:2). These strategies, according to the DfE paper *The National Strategies 1997–2011: A brief summary of the impact and effectiveness of the National Strategies* were argued to have left a *‘legacy of high-quality training materials, teaching and learning frameworks and well-trained teaching professionals and leaders of learning in schools, settings and more widely in the education sector’* (DfE, 2011:2). Despite these interventions, however, there was, and is, usually perceived to be a need for more.

Essentially, teachers are held responsible for delivering the agenda regarding literacy skills as shown in governmental policy through *‘the development of pupil’s spoken language, reading, writing and*

vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject' (DfE, 2014). The National Curriculum Framework (2014) contends that through reading children develop '*culturally, emotionally intellectually, socially and spiritually*'. It was argued that it was to '*promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment*' (DfE, 2014:3). This dual purpose of reading in schools runs through both the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the National Curriculum.

The EYFS framework is the precursor to the National Curriculum which is organised into blocks of years (Key Stages) with children's literacy being tested at each stage. Continuing and building on the work in the EYFS framework, the National Curriculum aimed to ensure that all children can read easily, fluently, and widely (for pleasure and information), whilst developing a wide vocabulary and the '*understanding of grammar and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language.*' In addition, it was intended to help children appreciate their literacy heritage and able to write coherently and clearly for a range of contexts, purposes, and audiences (DfE, 2014:3). However, some of these elements are easier to test than others, and so whilst the aims suggest one direction, testing can be said to push in another. Criticisms such as those noted as early as 2008 in the *National Testing by the Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families Third Report* pointed to the under-use of teachers' professional abilities and expressed concerns that the high-stakes nature of testing led to '*phenomena such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and focusing disproportionate resources on borderline pupils*'⁸.

Like the EYFS, the National Curriculum is also divided into two dimensions '*word reading and comprehension (both listening and reading)*' (DfE, 2014:4). Further, these dimensions have two distinct requirements, and it is deemed essential for teaching professionals to focus on both dimensions with different types of teaching needed for each. This involves,

...the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Underpinning both is the understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words. This is why phonics should be emphasised in the early teaching of reading to beginners (i.e., unskilled readers) when they start school (DfE, 2014:4).

This focus on phonics remains one of the most debated interventions in the recent teaching of reading, although the use of the word 'emphasised' in the quotation above suggests more flexibility around the

⁸ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmchilsch/169/16912.htm> (Accessed: July 2022)

use of phonics in the classroom than is usually understood to be the case by those for, or against, their use.

2.4.4 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

As this research project involved the nursery and primary reception class it is largely concerned with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This is the statutory framework for all early years' providers in England including maintained schools, independent and non-maintained schools and it governs both nursery and reception class in primary schools (DfE, 2021). The framework (EYFS) is divided into three sections: sections 1 and 2 are mostly associated with the learning and development requirements of the framework whilst section 3 relates to safeguarding and welfare requirements (DfE, 2021:3). The EYFS has four guiding and overarching principles designed to shape practice in early years setting, which are;

- *every child is a **unique child**, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured*
- *children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships***
- *children learn and develop well in **enabling environments with teaching and support from adults**, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.*
- *importance of **learning and development**. Children develop and learn at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (DfE, 2021:6) [DfE emphasis].*

These are strong and positive principles, as are those noted above regarding the National Curriculum, but again there is potentially a tension in this, given that the most recent iteration of the framework published by the DfE in March 2021, which came into effect in September 2021, sets specific learning standards to be applied across the sector that ensures children learn and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding by the time they transition to primary school. In a sense, this is a construction of childhood as futurity, in that preparation for the next stage is emphasised as part of a school readiness agenda, rather than there being an interest in the child as person now. This can also be seen as relating

to a construction of childhood which correlates with being primarily a pupil, something at odds with the holistic approach stated in the principles.

In section one of the *'EYFS the learning and development requirements are to work in partnership with parents and/or carers to promote the learning and development of all children,'* working across the three areas to ensure the children are prepared for their progression to year 1, again emphasising the early years as a phase for prioritising school readiness (DfE, 2021:6). In a positive sense, this means that the EYFS encourages parental involvement in their child's learning and development. They are also involved in the assessment process, as parents are given a written summary of their child's attainment against Early Learning Goals using assessment ratings which indicate three key levels: *'emerging,' 'expected' and 'exceeded'* (Early Years Foundation Stage Assessment Reporting Arrangements, 2020). This assessment report summarises all areas of learning, comments on general progress and is intended to help identify next steps. The terms used, however, suggest a set of norms against which a child's skills will be measured, which can also be seen as in tension with the acknowledgment of different rates of learning and development in the principles.

To move on from principles and parental involvement, within the EYFS there are three prime areas that form the foundation of this statutory framework. These are *'communication and language, physical development, and personal, social, and emotional development'* (DfE, 2021:8). These are further divided into *'four specific areas including literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design'* (DfE, 2021:8). Although many of the prime areas and principles blur into each other and are interrelated, for the purposes of this project I focus on aspects of the EYFS that are more pertinent to the research agenda. This starts with children's spoken language, which, according to the 2021 framework underpins all areas of learning and development. The essence of communication and language is argued to be engaging children in stories of all kinds, reading to children frequently, and offering extensive opportunities to *'use and embed new words in a range of contexts'* (DfE, 2021:8). The EYFS emphasises the role of teachers as modelling and supporting children through conversation, storytelling, and role play, to share and develop their own ideas and stories linking to the *'expressive arts and design'* dimension that highlights children's *'artistic and cultural awareness and supports their imagination and creativity'* (DfE, 2021:8). This presumes that teachers are themselves confident readers across a range of texts and familiar with children's literature. Further the prime area of *'understanding the world'* is addressed by children listening to stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems, so enabling children to understand and be aware of differing cultures, societies, technologies, and the ecologically diverse world. All this activity is intended to extend

children’s familiarity with words, ‘*enriching and widening their vocabulary supporting later reading comprehension*’ (DfE, 2021:8). Within the framework reading consists of two dimensions ‘*language comprehension and word reading*’ (DfE, 2021:8). The second element is seen as a stepping-stone to ‘*skilled word reading*’ and like the element of the National Curriculum noted earlier, involves speedy decoding and word recognition (Anning, 2003). It also ‘*involves writing transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing)*’ (DfE, 2021:8). However, in analysing these statements academics have indicated that discussions about governance and curriculum contain several different responses to ideas about reading and, in effect, surface two reading agenda at work simultaneously. To return to Cremin (2011:3), for instance, she contends that a subtle balance needs to be achieved by teaching professionals between the ‘*responsibility to teach reading/literacy appreciation and to support wider reading*’ (See Figure 7 below).

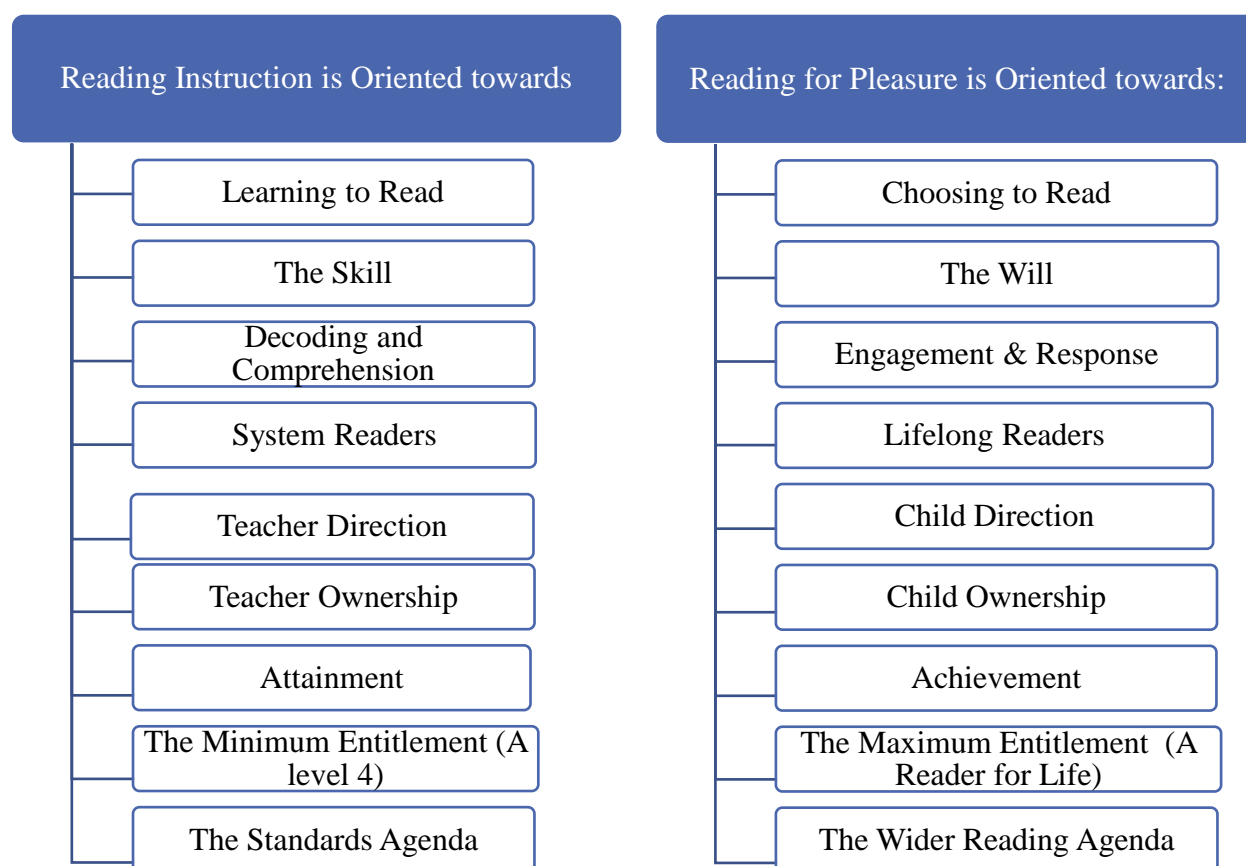


Figure 7 The Subtle Balance. Cremin (2011)

The former aspect, teaching reading or reading instruction, is seen by Cremin as essential and part of the ‘*Standards Agenda*’ (2011:3). However, the term suggests some distance from the interactions between teacher and child, and to an extent points towards the politicised nature of reading. Cremin

addresses this by arguing that teaching professionals also need to plan a '*reading for pleasure pedagogy*' which fosters children's engagement as an element of the '*Wider Reading Agenda*' (2011:3). This balance demands the ability to '*foster both the skill and the will to read*' (Cremin, 2011:3). With regard to this dual structure, it is suggested that the former is given considerably more emphasis than the latter and that this, in turn, de-centres the child.

2.4.5 Reading Instruction: The Standards Agenda

The Standards Agenda is a formal agenda that engages with the pronunciation and recognition of printed words employing reading instruction under the heading of Learning to Read as illustrated in Figure 7. It focuses on recognising and '*translating symbols into speech sounds and literal meanings*' (Cremin, 2011:3) predominantly associated with what Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2006:1) describe as '*conventional signs (texts)*.' This level of understanding is valuable in terms of close analysis of the development of reading skills and cognitive decoding of language (Cremin, 2011) and importantly understanding what '*letters stand for, put letters together to produce words, and understand what words stand for*' (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006:1). Rose (2006:4) made a similar point about words needing to be decoded by the child reader to make sense of the text and recommended using phonics, but he, like Cremin, also insisted that reading involves '*far more than decoding words on the page.*'

This agenda is the foundation of formal reading instruction and has historically focussed on teaching the alphabet, spelling practices, memorisation of lists of words, poems, rhymes, etc., and reading out loud. The focus on functional literacy is, as these activities suggest, bound by practices such as word recognition and phonics, and is wholly dependent on '*teacher direction*' (Cremin, 2011:3). This emphasis on the cognitive processes of creating meaning through deciphering a series of symbols strung together to make words, which in turn are organised into sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, remains significant (Goodwin, 2008:4).

However, Goodwin (2008:4) offers a convincing analysis of differing perspectives and layers of understanding and engagement in reading and suggests there are three varying levels: '*the literal level, beyond the literal and the personal level.*' In relation to this agenda the literal level is most pertinent as it engages the eye and encompasses recognising and '*translating symbols into speech sounds and literal meanings*' (Goodwin, 2008:4; Nodelman, 1981). Similarly, according to Nikolajeva (2014:2), these approaches typically result in only '*surface understanding.*' This would imply that the child reader can simply answer elementary questions about content or order of events and possibly explain to an extent '*what the author wants to say*' (Nikolajeva, 2014:2). Seldom, according to Goodwin

(2008:4) are proficient readers '*conscious of these cognitive processes*' when encountering a new unfamiliar text.

2.4.6 Reading Schemes

There has been deliberation and debate about the use of reading schemes and '*formal reading instruction versus real books for the teaching of reading*' (Capper, 2013:3) for many years. Such schemes consist of '*a series of specially written books... sequenced or graded according to their level of difficulty*' (Solity & Vousden, 2009:470). This measuring of literacy emphasises the notion of raising standards and so is explicitly attached to the Standards Agenda. Reading schemes provide '*readers with a controlled vocabulary, offering opportunities for exposure to phonically regular and high-frequency words, thus promoting an emphasis on decoding as the most important skill in early reading*' (Solity and Vousden, 2009:470).

As Cremin (2011) has argued, children's reading in educational contexts is often beset with ideas of attainment and is dependent on statistics, measurement techniques, and schemes or initiatives that contribute to the Standards Agenda, leaving professionals attempting to measure progress (as noted in Sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4). This has been a concern for some time, for as Meek (1988:30) suggested, '*the signs of genuine reading development are hard to detect as they appear and bear little relation to what is measured by reading tests.*' Standardised testing, therefore, is subject to concerns from academics and practitioners about why and how ability is measured and what criteria are imposed.

The Standards Agenda also tends to frame childhood as a 'blank slate' (See Section 2.2.2) where children are simply waiting to '*be inscribed by experience, presenting childhood in a manner both more benign and passive*' (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:39). In addition, the professional's role in the Standards Agenda is geared more to what Meek (1988:7) defines as '*schooling literacy*' using reading schemes and off-the-shelf reading interventions and strategies. Overall, criticisms of the Standards Agenda state that the emphasis on instruction, combined with testing and measuring, means that there is little time or space set aside in the curriculum to '*foster children's engagement in reading for pleasure*' (Cremin, 2014:1). Thus, this agenda limits the engagement of both staff and children and narrows what is considered important or appropriate.

2.4.7 Reading for Pleasure: The Wider Reading Agenda

In describing the Wider Reading Agenda, Cremin (2011) states that it is aligned with reading for pleasure, which is central to this research and acts as a counterpoint to the focus on measurement and

testing shown in Sections 2.4.5. and 2.4.6. Despite the dominance of testing, it is widely acknowledged that reading for pleasure has a significant impact on academic achievement and development both in literacy and other curriculum areas (OECD, 2002). The Wider Reading Agenda is also aligned to Goodwin's two remaining levels '*beyond the literal*' and '*the personal level*' (2008:4). Goodwin argues that these levels inform understanding more deeply, with '*the personal level*' characterized as distinguishing being a reader from someone who is simply able to read (2008:5). These higher levels are indicated by children making judgments and bringing pre-existing experiences to texts, so engaging with them on a personal level that is accompanied by an emotional response.

These two levels are predicated on the application of an individual's knowledge and understanding (Goodwin, 2008). Goodwin argues that the personal level is associated with the heart and is much more about emotional responses to the impact of the text including excitement, fear, boredom, inspiration, indifference etc. (2008:4), and so is germane to this research. Mallet suggests that texts that evoke such responses tend to reflect a varied '*range of human issues, tapping into feelings of love and hate, joy and sadness, life and death, so that our feelings are engaged*' (2020:3). Of course, the nature of the text is pertinent to these ideas of levels of engagement, linking with Barthes' (1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005) readerly and writerly texts. The more complex the text the more opportunities it offers and the more possibilities there are for higher levels of engagement.

2.4.8 Reading for Pleasure

The term reading for pleasure appears in many contexts including '*literacy campaigns, curriculum documents, school policies and classroom practices*' (Burnett & Merchant, 2018:62). It also has multiple interpretations and so can be considered a fuzzy concept. In addition, the term suggests that other forms of reading may be unpleasurable. In this research, I employ a comparatively focused definition from Christina Clark and Kate Rumbold's work with the National Literacy Trust that it is '*reading that we do of our own free will anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading*' (2006:6). This can be associated with print text or digital media, but for the purpose of this project I will be predominantly discussing it in relation to printed texts.

Reading for pleasure conjures up and evokes the spirit of reading where children escape into imaginary worlds with 'classic' works (Burnett & Merchant, 2018) as well as linking to Goodwin's levels of reading and engagement at the '*beyond literal level*' and the '*personal level*' (2008:4). In addition, it is linked by Parry and Taylor (2018:103) to identity, as they contend that reading for pleasure does not exist in isolation but is an integral part of a '*children's emerging identities and dispositions towards literacy*.' Leigh Hall (2012:369) in her research into '*rewriting identities*' offers a definition of '*reader*

identities,’ that is supported by other academics, which focuses on ‘*how capable individuals believe they are in comprehending texts, the value they place on reading and their understating of what it means to be a particular type of reader within a given context.*’ In this thesis the children participants perceptions of their own reader identities are foregrounded and analysed in later chapters. In addition, for children perceived as not yet able to read, there are opportunities for pleasure in coming to understand how printed texts work, via exploring the book as object, including which way up it must be held, how the pages turn, etc. (CLPE, 2016). In a sense, then, it could be argued that children read from the minute they pick up a book and pay attention to it, something that Elizabeth Sulzby and William N. Teale (1991) described as emergent literacy.

The children involved in this project were moving beyond interacting with books as objects as their sole form of engagement and their interest was turning to stories and how they work. This segues into discovering patterns of events, of characters, of ideas, of images and of the language woven and embroidered into texts (Chambers, 1991). It is argued that children’s engagement with stories supports their understanding and the ability to use ‘*conventions of language, narrative, cohesion and multimodality in their creative work*’ (Parry & Taylor, 2018:103).

Nationally, as noted above, reading for pleasure appears in reading campaigns, which may run via schools and libraries, but are specifically about engaging families in reading practices at home, the other key context in this research. These interventions are typically organised by reading charities, which have been integral in the support for and development of, reading communities. For instance, BookTrust, the largest UK reading charity, has a remit to develop children’s love of reading. The organisation routinely runs nationwide programmes including Bookstart which gives free books to babies and offers families resources and advice. Their focus is predominantly on early years and involving the whole family in reading. In addition, they work with and support teachers and school librarians. They argue, as do researchers, that children need ample opportunities to experience listening to, sharing, and discussing high-quality books with their parents, other adults, peers, and siblings to engender a love of reading and support social and emotional wellbeing. The emphasis on early years at BookTrust is supported elsewhere through the suggestion that the stories we read and hear are integral to the ways in which babies, as well as older children, make sense of their lives and their worlds (Attenborough, 2008:13).

When reading for pleasure, children engaging with picturebooks tend to scrutinise both pictures and words and moving back and forward between the two to piece together meaning (Lewis, 2001). Again, this differs from the curriculum focus on words and decoding. Part of these books appeal for many

children is the textual variety they offer, in contrast to most reading scheme materials which are comparatively limited in terms of potential interpretations. They are also texts which are often shared, amongst children or between adults and children (whilst reading schemes, even when shared remain part of a testing regime with a hierarchical element). This returns to the idea of reading being a social practice, as highlighted by Cremin (2021:5) who suggests that attitudes towards reading, and in particular reading for pleasure, are enmeshed in reading histories, the ways teachers encountered at school viewed children as readers, and personal reading experiences. The mention of school and educators above, indicates that discourses of reading and literacy are important when considering reading located within educational contexts. As Cremin argues (2011) reading for pleasure is often recognised as an immersive experience of engagement and response to printed text, especially when reading fiction. Therefore, there is much research dedicated to this activity as a significant factor in children's educational development, related to children making the choice and having the desire to read, and to the idea of developing lifelong readers (Cremin, 2011; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021).

Cremin (2014:1) argues that reading for pleasure activities are often consigned to the '*margins of the school day*' or framed as '*periods of silent reading when children are expected to read (and enjoy) the books assigned to them.*' This implies that many practitioners view reading as a solitary pursuit, resonating with the findings discussed later in this thesis associated with keen and able readers. This also alludes to the way that the Standards Agenda is policy and teacher driven, and central. In contrast, the Wider Reading Agenda is '*child driven*' with the child taking '*ownership*' of engagement and the reading experience and so is focussed on achievement rather than attainment, positioning the child reader as autonomous and a decision-maker (Cremin, 2011). That it is marginalised may be argued to be about power relations between children and adults in educational settings, given the drivers in the curriculum.

That said, many practitioners, according to Cremin (2014:1), do recognise the value of developing readers and '*nurturing positive attitudes to reading and the affective engagement of all readers is profiled.*' Thus, the validation and recognition of reading for pleasure broadens ideas about reading and therefore supports practitioners to build on children's everyday reading experiences and journeys (Cremin, 2014).

2.4.9 A Subtle Balance

Finding and creating an effective balance between '*reading instruction*' and '*reading for pleasure*' according to Cremin (2014:1) is '*neither simple nor straightforward*'. There are a number of sources which analyse the drivers for literacy learning and tensions with policy and prescription, including the

podcast for *Fresh Ideas for Teaching* entitled *Learning to Read: What really matters with Frank Serafini* (2020) in which Serafini, a literacy advocate, academic and former teacher, is interviewed by Jamie Downey. In the interview Serafini talks about the deeply held ‘*beliefs that educators have about learning – specifically literacy learning*’, suggesting that certain elements of pedagogic practice fundamental to literacy success should be non-negotiable. He refers to them as ‘*hills we are willing to die on*’ which he considers ‘*absolutely critical to literacy success for students.*’ Downey asked him to share his ‘hills’ which are outlined in Figure 8 below. His interview emphasises the importance of reading communities, child centredness and opportunities for children and adults to talk both formally and informally about books. He also states that diversity is needed in terms of materials and asks that the teacher act as a facilitator for a broad range of literacy activity. The ‘hills’, therefore, are more about reading for pleasure than instruction, and argue for a recentring of practice. This response resonates with the conceptual structure of this research project in terms of outcomes for the child reader.

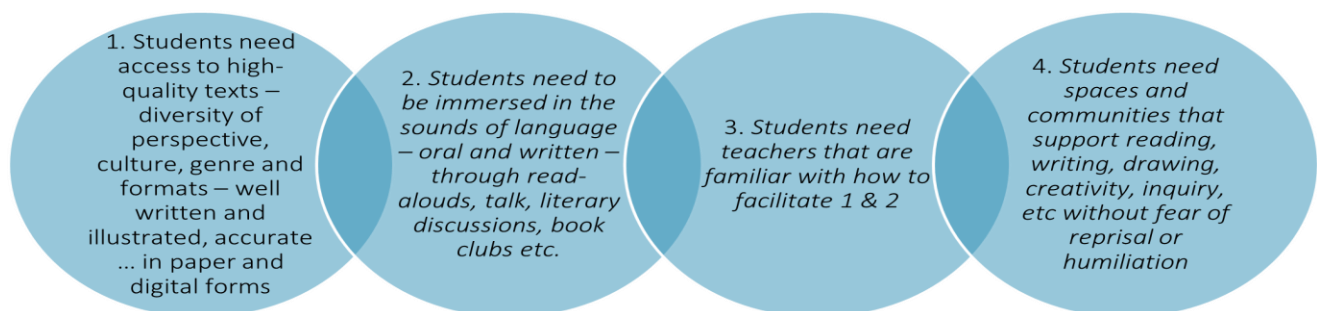


Figure 8. Serafini's 'Hills'

This argument for passion and practice has re-emerged in the face of challenges that Cremin argues, mean that teaching professionals in the primary sector have been getting to grips with a wealth of ‘*new policy initiatives, increased prescription over the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of literacy teaching and ongoing accountability pressures*’ (2011:2). To return to the Rose Review on the teaching of early reading, for instance, it was argued that the main ingredients for success in the teaching of beginner readers are a ‘*well-trained teaching force; well designed, systematic programmes of work that are implemented thoroughly; incisive assessment of teaching and learning, and strong, supportive leadership*’ (Rose, 2006:2). These elements of pedagogic practice should be fundamental to any professional practice, but

the emphasis is on the adults involved and a standardising of what they are to do. Conversely, Serafini highlights less generic expectations, focuses on supporting the child in developing their sense of reader identity, and argues in favour of the need for educational professionals working with children's reading and literature to be informed about the world of children's literature (Serafini, 2020), including familiarity with authors, illustrators, and publishers (Goodwin, 2008; Cremin et al., 2014). Another contrast is that Serafini mentioned the need to develop spaces and communities that support and encourage reading, writing, drawing, creativity and inquiry and research. These spaces, both physical and cognitive, are discussed in the next part of this chapter.

2.5 Children's Geographies and Reading Spaces

'Shape clay into a vessel, it is the space within that makes it useful' (Lao Tzu, 6th Century).

Lao Tzu reminds people to consider how they utilise the spaces they create and think about why they were created in first place. I relate these ideas of creating and utilising physical spaces, to what are described by Wyness (2018) as discreet shared understandings of the conventions and constraints of children's use of space. This is part of the discipline of Children's Geographies, the fourth element that forms part of the theoretical framework, which is engaged with the everyday lives of children. It is sometimes linked with the idea of geographies of childhood, which, like the distinction made in Childhood Studies, emphasises adult constructions of childhood and their impact on children's lives. The use of the plural is related to the variables around childhood regarding time and location, and through family, class and gender. This discipline recognises that children had largely been missing from previous studies in human geography and so studies the places and spaces of children's lives, considering them in terms of ethics and politics as well as experientially. It explores the diversity of young people's experiences across the age ranges associated with them. It shares many of the underpinning principles of Childhood Studies, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, although, as in Childhood Studies there have been challenges to these principles, such as that by Peter Kraftl (2013).

So far in this thesis the references to space have been relatively abstract, including conceptual cognitive space in terms of children's ability to reflect, construct and contemplate texts and reading practices. Additionally, there has been discussion about textual space in terms of the actual books as reading spaces as well as how books work. Thus, the term space is multidimensional in terms of definitions. However, space in the context of this section is mostly connected with physical spaces in particular spaces of education and home, one of the foci of the discipline (McKendrick, 2000). These physical spaces, in a traditional sense, according to Sriskandarajah (2020:1) have often been viewed as '*context or backdrop for the object of analysis.*' Whereas this research, foregrounds the importance of space being recognised as socially produced, rather than being '*seen as natural*' (Lefebvre, 1991:16).

Thus, this work explores, amongst many other things, the dominant cultural discourse that childhood does not belong in public space and is mostly associated with family and home and with nurturing, caring, and familial ties and bonds (Wells, 2015). In looking at the spaces of reading, at home and school, this study deals with the seemingly ordinary, which, as John Horton and Peter Kraftl (2006) assert, regarding children's geographies more widely,

...can be complex, mundane, unsettling and thoroughly material-spatial-embodied-evental. In other words, there is more to children's geographies than purely representational or symbolic notions of Growing Up. Rather, it is argued that there is always-already-all-sorts-going-on-... (Horton & Kraftl, 2006:259).

Children's Geographies contributes to the theoretical framework for this study, in dealing with the everyday and tensions around adult and child use and creation of space, as well as the disciplinary interest in children's voices and the acknowledgement of the child as person now.

2.5.1 Space, Power, and the Regulation of Childhood

Human wellbeing is dependent upon the environments in which individuals, families and cultures exist, which means that access to positive and healthy spaces is needful as to be without them has an impact upon how well people thrive. Thus, space can be controversial, especially when entangled with issues like poverty, war, economic inequalities across regions and nations, or the displacement of populations. It is adults who create these spaces, whether large or small scale, and enable children's access to them, although the ability of adults to create space may be limited by economic and other factors. To focus down on educational or private spaces these spaces are additionally ordered and organised by adults who assume the responsibility of knowing what children need and what is more desirable, or best, for them. Again, this is contingent on economic and social power. Overall, this means that adults impose boundaries and restrictions on spaces for children.

At a domestic and educational level this creates tensions about the ownership, design, and development of specific spaces, surfacing issues about the ways in which children are viewed as passive recipients of adult generated spaces. Created from a position of knowing, the development of spaces assumes what is best for childhood and subsequently directly, or indirectly, constructs and reinforces versions of childhood mentioned earlier in this chapter. Thus, childhood is defined as Jenks suggested as being '*perceived as being in the wrong place, like the parental bedroom, Dad's chair, the public house or even crossing a busy road [...]*' (2005:74). In terms of social space, children, according to Jenks (2005:74) are, '*sited, insulated and distanced, and their very gradual emergence into wider, adult space is by accident, by degrees, as an award or as part of a gradualist rite de passage.*'

The maintenance of social space involves adults in controlling and surveying children to ensure childhood does not transgress and come to occupy adult spaces and to maintain and enforce societal rules (Steeves & Jones, 2016). Thus, when considering physical spaces, they are typically conceptualised as being designed with specific ideas about childhood in mind and with ideas about whether any given space is considered suitable to be used by children (James & James, 2012:121). Christopher Spencer and Mark Blades (2006:1) make some important distinctions between environments *for* children and environments *of* children. They suggest that '*environments of children are not always environments for children*'. They argue that some spaces are designed specifically for children to meet their needs (these are *for* children), whereas other environments (*of* children), whilst

also designed by adults, are often left-over kinds of spaces or spaces that children tend to appropriate for their own uses (James & James, 2012:123). Space and place in both Childhood Studies and Children's Geographies, therefore, highlights the importance of structure in the appropriation by children of places designed to separate children from adults. This relates in turn to children's agency, and many studies consider '*the ways in which children take over or appropriate different spaces for a range of activities and by doing so transform them*' (James & James, 2012:123).

2.5.2 Reading Environments

In broad terms, academic interest in reading spaces is significant from both a pedagogic and research perspective and emerges from Education, as well as Children's Geographies and other disciplines such as Librarianship. The breadth of interest, as indicated in *The Reading Environment* (Chambers, 1991), means that the booklet was,

...intended for people who work with children and reading – teachers, librarians, parents; those who want to refresh and revise their practice, and those just starting out who may be thinking about these things for the first time (Chambers, 1991:7).

Reading spaces are perceived, by many, as transformational spaces where children are empowered to do what Rolf Erikson and Carolyn Markuson (2007:9) describe as '*synthesiz[ing] myriad pieces of information*' into personal knowledge. Designed to foster and encourage the development of understanding rather than being mere information depositories, Erikson and Markuson (2007) argue that a well-designed reading space weaves both virtual and physical spaces together and must be part of an ongoing collaborative process, drawing on multiple expertise and experiences. However, space is often at a premium in homes and educational settings and the creation of collections, or the allocation of space to read, may be limited.

Educational contexts highlight the need for book areas or reading spaces that are situated away from the noisy bustle in the classroom. However, the most powerful potential reading space, the school library, is not statutory in England, and although many schools do have one, they range from dedicated space to bookcases in a corridor, with the latter still being defined by some education professionals as libraries (Clark & Teravainen, 2017). Where these spaces exist in more than a tokenistic manner, they are typically designed to provide comfortable attractive seating and a homelike quality, which suggests an association of reading for pleasure with the private. The informality is intended to support concentration and comfort for the child reader and so to encourage a love of reading.

There is a considerable amount of critical literature that researches the qualities and design of reading spaces within educational contexts, including work by Kathleen Roskos and Susan B. Neuman (2011:110) that suggests that it is the key environment that *'informs and documents social interactions,'* whilst also shaping how teachers and children think, feel, and behave. Consequently, its qualities will therefore influence the lives of both adults and children. There are, however, often real constraints with existing infrastructures and Roskos and Neuman (2011:110) suggest that these can be challenging when there are *'complex social pathways to be mapped, explored and negotiated when establishing routines and creating communities of learners.'*

In Britain, there is constant debate in the education sector about the curriculum, schooling policy, staff dynamics and behaviour management that are the *'socially prescribed'* issues which have a strong influence on the ways in which schools operate (Blundell-Jones, 2014:13). However, more recently debates and discussions about spatial design within schools have been foregrounded. Peter Blundell-Jones (2014) contends the spatial setting of education is never neutral and patterns of using space in settings can be easy or equally, they can be difficult. The classroom environment, therefore, can work for teaching professionals or can work against them.

Roskos and Neuman (2011:110) point out that classroom environments are *'first, last and always'* among pedagogical concerns and juggling the demands on these spaces can be challenging. Thus, for many teaching professionals it is often difficult *'to make an imaginative leap to envisage how it might be otherwise'* (Blundell-Jones, 2014:13). It is this imaginative leap in terms of spaces for reading that is of interest to this project, as it insists that for change to occur and for reading spaces to exist that benefit children, teaching professionals need to reconceptualise the ways in which existing space can be utilised. What is more, this demands professionals relinquish control and power over educational spaces, something which Elaine Ostroff (2016:6) suggests can be challenging and requires that educators, rather than just making an imaginative leap, must also take *'a leap of faith.'* These ideas about changing and developing reading spaces should encourage teaching professionals to develop innovative and creative environments to support children's love of books and reading, but as clearly stated in the research, this comes at a risk in terms of professional identity and status. I discuss this further in the final chapters.

Classroom spaces and reading environments designed by adults, for children, can and often do, represent specific attitudes and preferences in terms of what is important. Chambers (2011:22) distinguishes between two key conditions that determine whether activities are enjoyable or not, which he calls the *'set'* and *'the setting.'* By *'set'* Chambers (2011:22) is referring to the mental and emotional

attitudes that human beings bring to the things they do or create. These attitudes include knowledge and experiences, current feelings, relationships with others, but even link to seemingly unrelated aspects of life such as the time of day or even the weather, all of which determine the way individuals behave (Chambers, 2011:22). This is true when developing reading activities within an educational context, where professionals bring their own experiences and attitudes about reading, how they feel, and their understanding of relationships within the context, all of which will impact on their understanding of what is appropriate or desirable. The second condition is '*the setting*' which is about the physical surroundings and environment and the '*appropriateness*' to the activity (Chambers, 2011:22). Chambers (2011:23) argues that '*set*' is more a more powerful influence than '*setting*.' In addition, Chambers (2011:19) often uses the term '*place*' to define the surroundings, either at home or school, that best enables reading when referring to his '*Reading Circle*'. He suggests that schools, which inevitably have communally used spaces where lots of people engage in a range of activities, need to manage these spaces to support children to read regularly and ensuring their '*concentration is protected*' (Chambers, 2011:19).

Using reading as an illustrative example in terms of set and setting, the person who reads willingly and is passionate about the role and value of reading for pleasure has the set and if they create a comfortable environment devoted to engaging others in reading for pleasure (the setting) then the space will be effective and might even be considered a place. These ideas are also applicable in terms of reader spaces and environments created and designed by child readers themselves which are often quiet and private spaces located within the home environment.

These ideas about space are a key part of the later chapters, especially regarding the children's views on the location of reading, but also in consideration of the leap of faith taken by professionals in the setting in terms of relinquishing power over reading spaces. In addition, the child participant's views on what makes a good reading environment are considered, with those of adults also discussed. Finally, the final chapters also look at space in relation to how teachers' perceptions of childhood (as part of the set) are reflected in the reading spaces they designed and created within the classroom.

2.6 In conclusion.

This chapter has explored academic work at the intersection of four disciplines, and within that intersection, two key concerns for all of the disciplines involved the sociology of childhood and the children's rights discourse. This serves to locate the study and the sections have pointed out where aspects of the research build upon and complement existing work, as well as where it addresses an absence. The research is unique in drawing together these disciplines in exploring the multifaceted

experience of reading as a child, an experience that is more typically located solely in Education. In addition, it has flagged up where material from beyond the academy is relevant to the project, such as educational policy.

Further, this chapter has looked at literature relevant to the study which contributes to the overall theoretical framework, hence taking in notions that relate to the two key concerns, like voice, participation, agency and cultural constructions of childhood, constructions of literacy, and the impact of policy. These ideas are also relevant in the constructions of the methodology, as the next chapter indicates. The focus on emotions and identity as part of the reading experience is also flagged up here and forms a significant element in the later chapters.

This theoretical framework fits within the conceptual framework of the whole project. Developing this framework has not been without its challenges, as it has emerged over a long period of time and draws together many contested ideas of childhood, reading, spaces and children's literature, forming a complicated and interlinked web of ideas. Many of the perspectives are multidimensional, and appear across the different disciplinary domains, which inevitably means there are blurred areas in discussing the key concepts.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The main methodological approaches I adopted are explored in this chapter. I also consider the scope and limitations of the strategies I employed. In addition, I extend the points in the introduction regarding my professional background and positionality, which had an impact upon the qualitative approach adopted. Understanding this position was achieved through systematic analysis of the critical literature as well as examination and self-reflection on how my values and beliefs shape my understanding of how knowledge is constructed. It was challenging attempting to clarify and negotiate my ethical position with regards to working with both adult and child participants, but productive too. Given all that I consider here, the methodology can be understood as a '*bridge*' between my philosophical assumptions about how knowledge is constructed, and the procedures and methods chosen to collect and study the data (Blaxter et al., 2010), or as David Morgan (2007:123) describes it as merging the '*abstract*' and the '*mechanical*.' To begin this discussion, it is helpful to reiterate the overall aims and objectives of the research project.

- To work with children in meaningful ways to capture their individual narratives with regards to their reading experiences and histories in nursery and primary reception education and at home, to inform educational practices.
- To use both an ethnographic approach (phase one) and a creative participatory Mosaic approach (phase two) incorporating Scrapbooks and other creative research methods as stimuli or prompts to capture aspects of children's reading experiences through child conferencing (Clark & Moss, 2015).
- To work with teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians to capture their individual experiences of reading as children and to capture their reading histories.
- To produce high quality research that offers insights into the ways in which children, teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians engage with the love of books and reading.

Having already grounded the thesis, aims and objectives in the theoretical framework of the sociology of childhood and children's rights discourses in the previous chapter, the current chapter extends this theoretical framework to reflect upon concepts of participation in terms of researching *with* children rather than research *on* children which significantly redefines and reconceptualises children's status. To understand the foundations of this shift, a consideration of historical perspectives on researching childhood is needful.

3.2 Researching Childhood: Then and Now

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, the dominant approach to research about children was mostly aligned to and characterised by the distinctive features of empirical enquiry. This was mostly related to a positivist paradigm, or ‘scientific inquiry,’ with children and childhood being predominantly observed and research on. Work on children and childhood was also seen as typically ‘*absent from the discourse of social scientists*’ (Clarke et al., 2014:35). Where it existed, research was usually dominated by attitudes towards childhood that reinforced and emphasised children as objects of research, positioning them as powerless in society and often as vulnerable and incompetent (Morrow & Richards, 2002).

Whilst it would be disingenuous to suggest that the corpus of knowledge and understanding developed by psychologists and other social scientists has not had a significant impact on more recent childhood research agendas (James & Prout, 1997), the extension of the study of childhood can be seen as an attempt to counter the issues inherent in earlier research, as was also the case in Children’s Geographies when it emerged, largely in the 1990s. Thus, disciplines addressing children and childhood came to offer new ways of recovering the ordinary lives of the less powerful and marginalised elements of society which have historically been missing (Clarke, 2010). Towards the end of the twentieth century critical theorising in social sciences saw childhood become more central to personal, political, and academic research agendas. During this time ideas about childhood were underpinned by a range of political and institutional structures and developments which tended to focus on the regulation of childhood (Wyness, 2015).

The increase in research on childhood throughout the twentieth century may be related to the way that it was referred to as the ‘*century of the child.*’ It was argued that there was no other time in history when childhood had such a high profile (Key, 1900; James & Prout, 1997). This begins at the start of that century when Swedish author Ellen Key (1900) predicted that some radical changes would occur in the ways that children and childhood would be conceptualised and treated. Key argued that children’s welfare, rights, and education would become a social and political priority, recognising that these priorities were not just the responsibility of the family. Her arguments were the subject of debate, but her ideas about children’s rights to childhood became embedded in the Swedish welfare state when it was established (Macinai, 2016). Her predictions have, therefore, been realised to some extent, paving the way for new ways of thinking, and researching childhood. Key was also engaged with the role of educators, who she argued should be mentors rather than supervisors (Macinai, 2016). Although these ideas were not necessarily recognised at the time, Key’s work also implies the need for professionals to work differently with children, prefiguring the shift to research with, rather than on,

children. This research project rejects the historical attitudes towards children that reinforced and emphasised children as objects of research, instead turning to the newer paradigm of childhood that positions children as actors in research (Greene & Hill, 2005; Mason & Danby, 2011). The methodological discussion that follows outlines and makes explicit some of the decisions made when developing and operationalising the research aims and objectives.

3.3 Research Paradigms

Researchers tend to have differing ideas about the best way to carry out their research (Mac Naughton et al., 2010) with research paradigms being constantly debated, constructed, and reconstructed. Indeed, there are even differing perspectives on the actual term paradigm. According to Thomas Kuhn (1970:175),

a paradigm is a set of beliefs, values and techniques which is shared by members of a scientific community, and which acts as a guide or map dictating the kinds of problems scientists should address and the types of explanations that are acceptable to them.

However, more recently and in its simplest form it is considered a ‘way to ‘see’ the world and organise it into a coherent whole’ (Hughes, 2010:35). Patrick Hughes (2010:35) offers a useful metaphor in explaining what a paradigm is, that of a picture frame, suggesting that just as a picture frame ‘frames’ a picture, a paradigm ‘frames’ a research topic. In addition, he also states that the choice of ‘picture frame influences how we see the picture within it.’ This idea is helpful in terms of seeing the significance of my choices of paradigm as a researcher and influences how I see my research topic or enquiry (Hughes, 2010:36; Mac Naughton et al., 2010).

Research literature frequently points out that a range of questions need to be asked to explain a researcher selected research paradigm (Hughes, 2010). These include an ontological question, a question about epistemology and methodological questions that includes ideas about criteria of validity. Research methodology, therefore, is firmly linked to ontology and epistemology which have specific rules on how to produce ‘valid knowledge of social reality’ (Ramazanoglu, 2002:11).

As mentioned in the introduction this research project follows the traditions of educational research. The ontological and epistemological position is not about objectively measuring impacts or influences relating to children’s experiences of reading to be able to make generalisations about reading itself. Instead, this research explores the contextual and subjective issues involved in reading for pleasure in a specific educational context that incorporates both school and home-based aspects. Like the disciplinary domains highlighted and discussed in the Literature Review, educational research and

scholarship emanates from multiple disciplines and employs many theoretical orientations and methodological approaches (BERA, 2023). Here educational research anchored the project and provided a philosophical grounding.

The ontological position or stance of this research project is the belief in multiple realities and the subjective nature of reality, therefore a set of assumptions about what the world is and within this project cannot exist outside the social context that create them, which for this study will be the educational context and the context of the institution of the family (Pickard, 2007; Henn et al., 2009). The epistemological stance adopted for this research project was constructivist in nature, emphasising the active role an individual plays in constructing meaning and knowledge through their social, cultural, and cognitive processes. Given that knowledge is subjective and context-dependent an interpretivist paradigm was chosen. The following diagram, adapted from Briony Oates (2006:292) ‘*characteristics of interpretivism,*’ outlines the philosophical grounding of this research.

Feature	Description
Objectives of Research	To gain understanding and insights into children, teachers, and parents/guardians/carers perspectives and experiences of reading for pleasure both in the classroom and home environment.
Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Multiple subjective realities ➤ Reality is constructed through human interactions. ➤ Important to discover how individuals make sense of their own social worlds and in the case of this research their daily routines and everydayness in the classroom and the home environment. ➤ Captured through observations, conversations, writings, social interactions, written text, and visual images. ➤ There are multiple social realities due to the differing individual experiences such as people’s knowledge, beliefs, views, and interpretations
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants in the research process socially construct knowledge through their real-life experiences within a social context. ➤ Events are analysed and understood through the process of interpretation which is influenced by the social context. ➤ This mode of data collection is a much more personal and interactive process of talking, observing, listening, reading, and writing.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ethnographic strategies used to establish rapport, select participants, mapping fields, keeping diaries and field notes (Geertz, 1973), questionnaires, reviews of the classroom collection book and holiday book audits, followed by using participatory tools such as scrapbooking, object elicitation, child conferencing, literacy events and storytelling.

Figure 9. Philosophical Grounding

As outlined in Figure 9, research which reflects a constructivist approach and interpretivist paradigm is not wedded to a single account, but celebrates a *'diversity of perspectives, while producing better interpretations of the phenomena being studied'* (Moses & Knutsen, 2019:204). The fundamental idea of an interpretivist paradigm being that reality is socially constructed highlights the role of language, culture, and historical contexts, and is, because of dynamic processes, formed through participation in social interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

When establishing my research paradigm boundaries, questions of ontological and epistemological positions were key (Pickard, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hughes, 2010). The research paradigm I chose needed to be a *'fluid and intuitive approach'* (Mac Naughton et al., 2010: 13), therefore my approach was inductive, in that I did not approach the task with a preconceived framework (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). This paradigm tends to adopt a qualitative approach to data, avoiding preconceptions about what will be discovered, and is open to theory emerging from the research, as well as modifying and adapting in response to developing understandings (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). Going further, this research paradigm is aligned to my model of childhood as children being active social actors in their own worlds and so best placed to voice their own versions/narratives about their understanding (Hughes, 2010; Fraser et al., 2014).

Of course, both inductive and deductive research approaches are valuable, but they differ considerably in terms of investigating specific *'phenomena of interest'* (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). Broadly speaking the paradigm/approach taken by any researcher will reflect the ways in which the researcher sees the world and sees knowledge.

Other paradigms were considered and rejected in respect of this project, in particular a positivist paradigm. The ontological stance of a positivist paradigm suggests the world exists on two levels. On one level the world is *'continuously changing surface of events and appearances'* and on another *'an unchanging foundation of order, expressed in universal law'* (Hughes, 2010:37). These ideas are drawn from the work of Kuhn (1970), as mentioned earlier. According to positivists one can *'explain and predict surroundings in terms of cause-and-effect relationships between random events and appearances and an underlying order of universal laws'* (Hughes, 2010:37). The fundamental thesis of positivism is that you can *'prove'* the existence of universal order, however as the underlying laws being discussed are invisible, many argue that you cannot (Hughes, 2010:37). This paradigm is mostly associated with scientific research where there is a need to prove or disprove knowledge. Some researchers adopt this more linear way of conducting their research using a step-by-step approach that is specifically focused on testing a hypothesis based on research and theory already completed and

published (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). This is a much more deductive research methodology that demands carrying out experiments in strictly controlled circumstances in a rigorous fashion, with procedures and results that are thought to reflect the world, *'unmediated or undistorted'* by the researcher's attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs (Hughes, 2010:37). Therefore, research follows *'rules of scientific investigation [creating] objective knowledge which is untainted by the researcher's own subjectivity'* and exists almost independently of the researcher's perception of it (Hughes, 2010:37). Researchers carrying out research adopting a positivist paradigm would therefore use a quantitative approach to data collection, focussing on how to measure and express a phenomenon (Hughes, 2010:58). As mentioned previously, this type of data serves to answer a question and returning to the metaphor of a frame a positivist paradigm *'frames'* the world as a collection of apparently independent phenomena to be counted, measured and otherwise catalogued as a prelude to deducing the rules or laws underlying them and giving them coherence' (Hughes, 2010:58).

When thinking about validity, positivists tend to validate knowledge by attempting to replicate it. This is seen as embedded within the rules that govern positivism as the impersonal approach renders the researcher as almost irrelevant in the research process therefore the project is valid because it is seen being able to *'be replicated whenever, wherever and by whomever the project is repeated'* (Hughes, 2010:36). A key point to highlight with regards the positivist paradigm is that science assists us on a *'journey'* by revealing more and more of the world, thus enabling us to increasingly control it (Hughes, 2010:50).

As an interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998) tends to reject the idea of an objective truth, the positivist canon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) although valuable, was not deemed as suitable in terms of the focus of the research. An interpretivist paradigm suggests that meaning and truth only come into existence through engagement with the outcome, resulting in defining realities of the world and meaning is not necessarily discovered but that people construct and co-construct their understanding of knowledge in different ways (Crotty, 1998:9). This does mean, of course, that another researcher may view the same phenomenon and find different value in particular artefacts or observe and interpret different behaviours, as well as stressing and identifying different elements that are considered by them to be important or most interesting (Dean et al., 2018).

3.4 Research Approach

As stated earlier, both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches were considered in developing this project. The key characteristics and features of quantitative research, as mentioned above, are mostly associated with measurement that concentrates more on the *'confirmatory'* phases

of a research process, with the formulation of a hypothesis and a test of numerical data to test the hypothesis (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Martyn Hammersley (2013:3) demonstrates the difference between the two by referring to the *'etymological'* method used by Fred Erickson (2011:43) who argued that *'from Latin, qualitas refers to a primary focus on qualities, the features, of entities – to distinctions in kind – while the contrasting term quantitas refers to a primary focus on differences in amount.'* The latter approach would militate against the idea of capturing children's experiences of reading and was therefore deemed as less appropriate.

Given that qualitative research is largely associated with both constructivist and interpretative paradigms, this qualitative, interpretative approach fits with my research agenda as it is involved with the discovery of specific qualities, features, entities, and perspectives. A qualitative research strategy can be defined in several ways. For instance, Alan Bryman (2008:366) states that, *'qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.'* This is helpful in framing aspects of the project, as discussion was important in eliciting the children's views, although responses also took other forms. This definition, and others, tend to select characteristics of qualitative research. Whilst it is possible to make a list of features or indeed characteristics according to Hammersley (2013) that can or would be referred to as qualitative research, he argues that attempting to define the distinguishing features of qualitative research can be challenging and is not necessarily straightforward.

In thinking about qualitative research then, other definitions proved more useful, as they moved into the philosophical underpinning, rather than characteristics. For instance, Margarete Sandelowski (2004:1366) argues, *'qualitative research is an umbrella term for an array of attitudes towards and strategies for conducting inquiry that are aimed at discovering how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world.'* This chimes with what this research was intended to discover and suggests the openness to a range of possible strategies that marks this type of enquiry, which is shown in my initial use of ethnographic strategies and the later adoption of participatory research methods such as interviewing, child conferencing, object elicitation and scrapbooking.

This epistemological position of educational research and my methodological choices regarding the participatory phase, can be seen as aligned to the Mosaic approach that offers a *'framework for listening'* through participatory research, so challenging the dominant discourse about whose and what knowledge counts (Clark & Moss, 2015:5). This framework sets out underpinning principles that make explicit views of young children including recognising children as *'experts in their own lives,'* *'children as rights holders,'* *'skilful communicators'* and *'young children as meaning makers'* all of

which are aligned to the '*new paradigm*' of childhood that underpins this research project (Clark & Moss, 2015:6).

These principles acknowledge children and adults as co-constructors of meaning and combines the visual with the verbal, using different modes of communication (Clark & Moss, 2015). This '*framework for listening*' identifies key components that are the fundamental basis of the research agenda and necessitates the use of multiple mixed research methods to recognise and capture the different voices or languages of children (Clark & Moss, 2015:7). Fundamental to the framework is the concept of participation (See Section 2.2.4) which focusses on and identifies children as experts in their own lives, whilst embedding notions of reflexivity whereby all participants in the research reflect upon meaning and collaboratively address questions of interpretation. Flexibility and adaptability are core to this framework, and it can be applied in a variety of childhood contexts with a view to being used as an evaluative tool to embed best practice in childhood settings and contexts (Clark & Moss, 2015:7).

This approach acknowledges that knowledge is '*mediated through cultural preconceptions and reflects these more readily than the character of the phenomena studied*' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019:11). This approach considers what Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison (2011) define as the dynamic and changing nature of society and highlights that there will be multiple interpretations of specific events which inevitably are shaped by an individual's historical and social perspective, so addressing the validity of knowledge (Henn et al., 2009). These perspectives are also influenced by cultural perspectives which for this project were integral in understanding the participants' ways of thinking and practicing, so providing legitimate knowledge or epistemology for the research (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

An intention of this research agenda was to get below the surface of the general evaluative characteristics of reading measurements often identified in checklists and rating scales that are designed to measure quality (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Stake, 1995). The two phases of this project were used to capture moments, feelings, and emotions through observations and fieldnotes combined with the stimulus of talk through the use of children's Scrapbooks in child conferencing discussions, and via object elicitation, literacy events and storytelling, so offering a rich picture and description (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

As a researcher adopting a constructivist approach within an early childhood educational setting, I was mindful of the importance of supporting voices to be heard (Moss, Dahlberg & Pence, 2000; James & Prout, 1997). These voices included teachers, families, carers, guardians and most importantly those

of the children themselves. What is important to note is that by capturing individual's voices the task of ethnographic strategies and perspectives (Green & Bloome, 1997) is, in the words of Peter Woods (1996:133) to recreate the 'feel' of an event,' *'evoke an image,' 'awaken a spirit' or 'reconstruct a mood or atmosphere.'* These ideas about the task of an ethnographer resonate with this research project and are embedded in the idea of *'thick description'* (Geertz, 1973:2). This way of thinking is germane to the research as it is about presenting everything that is needed for the *'reader to understand what is happening'* (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010:273). This in contrast to a *'thin description'* which is simply describing the event with little insight into the context or clear and relevant insights into the recorded events (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010:273). Figure 10 below is a summary of the methodological decisions made during this process and captures many of the aspects of the research design. The design of this research purposively crosses and blurs boundaries between ideas, models, and frameworks.

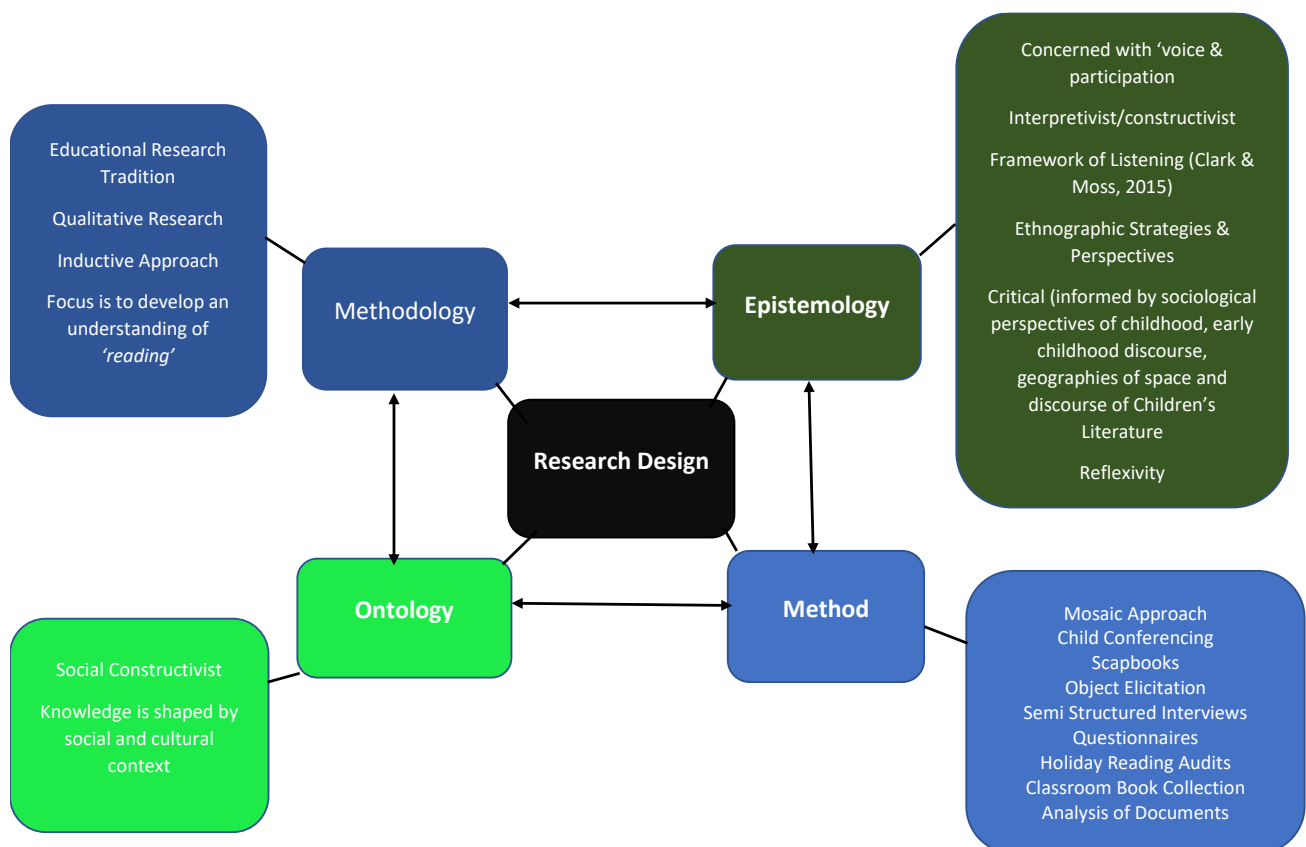


Figure 10. Methodological Framework

3.5 Research Context & Participatory Phase Sampling

Returning to the context of the research helps ground the methodological discussion and locates some of the methodological challenges and decision-making processes. As noted earlier, this research

project was situated in a combined nursery/primary reception class in a school in Northumberland in the North East of England, meaning the school practices followed English educational policy. The children registered in the classroom included 12 nursery children aged 4 years and 27 reception children aged 5 years, totalling thirty-nine children, as well as the teaching staff. The shared space was designed specifically to accommodate both nursery and primary reception children with a view to supporting the nursery age children's academic and social transition into reception class by offering insights into reception class activities. Consequently, the nursery children routinely joined the reception children for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum related activities (DfE, 2021). These activities followed the key learning and development requirements (See Section 2.4.4) of working in '*partnership with parents and/or carers to promote the learning and development of all children,*' across the three areas of '*communication and language, physical development, and personal, social, and emotional development*' (DfE, 2021:8). In England creating these environments is described in policy as ensuring that children are prepared for progression to year 1 (DfE, 2021:6). This can be seen as emphasising futurity rather than the child as a person now and positioning the early years largely as a phase for prioritising school readiness.

There is a great deal of literature outlining ways of specifying choices made with regards to research sampling. How sampling is done plays a key role in any research endeavour, as the features, composition and measure of the sample gives weight to the findings and subsequent data analysis of any research project (Pickard, 2007). In terms of sampling for the participatory phase, I deemed a non-probability strategy as most appropriate with a purposive sampling strategy which selected an '*information rich*' hand-picked sample to develop an in-depth research study (Patton, 2002:169; Blaxter et al., 2010). Going further, '*information rich*' refers to the individuals the researcher thinks are best placed to discuss issues central to the purpose and focus of the research (Patton, 2002:169). The potential sample included all the children registered in the selected classroom, discussed in 3.8.5, which included twelve nursery children aged 4 years and twenty-seven reception children aged 5 years, totalling thirty-nine children, as well as the Reception Class Teaching Professional, Nursery Teaching Professional, and School Literacy Lead Teaching Professional. However, although all the children were involved in the participatory aspects of the work to ensure equity and fairness within the cohort and context, only seventeen voices appear in the final thesis, reflecting whose parents gave permission regarding the use of data. As noted earlier, during the introductory event at the beginning of the project (see 1.5.1), the eleven parents/carers/guardians of the prospective participants who attended were given information sheets and consent forms and subsequently all gave consent. Following this event, the

parents/guardians/carers who did not attend were also sent copies of the information sheet and consent form via the children’s school reading bags, and a further six signed forms were received.

Research Participants	Participant Details
Reception Children Aged 5	Child 1,2,3,4,5,6,7, 12, 13,14, 16
Nursery Children Aged 4	Child 8, 9,10,11,15, 17
Reception Teaching Professional	Teacher One (Qualified for 3 years)
Nursery Teaching Professional	Teacher Two (Newly qualified)
School Literacy Lead Teaching Professional	Teacher Three (Qualified for more than 8 years)

Figure 11. Research Participants

Of the children, noted in Figure 11, there was a group of reception children aged 5 whose voices tended to dominate the research findings (coded as Child 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 in the final chapters). These children appeared to be thriving academically and seemed to be ‘*super-engaged*’ with school activities (Bovill, 2020:1023), a term often used to describe a student’s investment in education. As the project progressed their voices became integral to the research process as they were fascinated by the subject of reading and all that surrounds it, and were keen to share their experiences, ideas, and beliefs about reading. In addition, they were close friends and had strong bonds and relationships as will become evident in later chapters. This said, although this group of children’s voices were consistently present in the data, they are not the only voices represented within the research findings.

3.6 Ethnographic Perspectives & Strategies

Contemporary researchers tend to adopt a range of research techniques to capture the experiences of research participants. Ethnography was chosen because it ‘*expressly facilitates the desire to engage with children’s own views and enable their views and ideas to be rendered accessible to adults as well as to the children*’ (James, 2007:247) which is at the heart of this educational research and grounded in the theoretical framework focusing on the sociology of childhood and children’s rights, as outlined earlier.

As discussed previously there is a growing shift towards conducting research with children, with a view to foregrounding children’s perspectives (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2005; MacDonald, 2013; Cooper, 1993) and enabling children to be recognised as ‘*people who can be studied in their own right*

in social sciences' (James, 2007:246). This means ethnography has been widely adopted as a methodology that permits children to become seen as research participants, reflecting its significant role in the growth of the new sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997, James, 2007).

When applying the constructivist ideas to ethnographic research, then, one possibility is that ethnographers themselves are perceived as constructing the social world through their investigation and interpretation of it, rather than as representing it, something now widely accepted and adopted (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This relates to my aims for the research, which was to provide a '*holistic account that will include views and perspectives, beliefs and values of all of those involved in the particular sociocultural practice*' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010:271). Ethnography strives to understand the interactions of individuals not just with each other but also with the culture of the society in which they live (Merriam, 2015:24), permitting a view of '*children as competent interpreters of the social world*' (James, 2007: 246).

Of course, traditional ethnographic research is rooted in '*anthropological and cross-cultural study*' and involves studies that set out to describe practices of a social group and sociocultural understandings (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010:271) and by its very nature is interpretative. It is synonymous with exploring and studying at first-hand, in the form of social research, what people say about their experience and social context of their lives, from their own perspective (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) and is characterised as an approach that will seek to '*illuminate the subjective experience of participants in particular social situations, with the intention of generating understandings that may, to a significant extent, transcend the researcher's preconceptions*' (Cooper, 1993:323). Central to any research project is the necessity to take a reflexive approach, with researchers immersing themselves in the natural contexts/settings for periods of time to gain a more complex understanding of the lived experience (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Buch & Staller, 2014). This craft of ethnography involves lengthy contact with people in everyday natural settings as opposed to an experimental situation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Mukherji & Albon, 2015). That said, the idea of natural settings, given the context of the study, which was a nursery/primary setting, can be problematic, as teaching spaces can be considered to be about control, and so the idea of the 'natural' discussed further in 3.6.3.

To locate this study in relation to these ethnographic principles I draw upon the work of Judith Green and David Bloome (2004) whose work '*Ethnography and Ethnographies of and in Education: A Situated Perspective*' helped clarify where and how ethnographic strategies and perspectives were to be employed in this educational research project. Specifically, they outline two ways of distinguishing between ethnographic studies focusing on education as a site for inquiry as discussed below. The first

approach they discuss is ‘*ethnography and ethnographic studies -of- education*’, and the second is ‘*ethnography and ethnographic studies -in- education*’ (Green & Bloome, 2004:186, my emphasis).

3.6.1 Ethnographic Perspectives: Ethnographic Studies of Education

Ethnography of education involves anthropologists and sociologists using education as a place of study, to which they bring their ‘*theoretical frames, tools of inquire and a history from their field to construct an understanding of what counts as education to a local group*’ (Green & Bloome, 2004:186). From this perspective, educational sites are primarily physical research sites, and the research is not necessarily responding to the research site educators needs, issues or concerns. Although there are elements of this perspective that chimed with the project the purpose of this educational research was to surface the challenges and possibilities for professionals in engaging and encouraging children to share their reading experiences and expertise, therefore this perspective did not fully align with this project.

3.6.2 Ethnographic Perspectives: Ethnographic Studies in Education

The second perspective is ‘*ethnography and ethnographic studies in education*’ (Green & Bloome, 2004:186). This type of study is grounded in the field of ‘*education and the historical background of ethnography in anthropology and sociology*’ (Green & Bloome, 2004:186) and is guided and informed by educational questions, purposes, needs and concerns, something aligned to the aims and objectives of this project. However, in both ethnographic studies *in* education and *of* education there is overlap and blurring with all researchers drawing on ‘*frames, modes of inquiry and findings with the fields of anthropology and social sciences*’ (Green & Broome, 2004:186).

The basis of the initial data collection phase of the research followed an ethnographic trajectory in the form of direct observation to produce data (Hammersley, 2018), providing detailed information on the social and cultural context of the classroom. To do this I spent seven weeks immersed in and observing the space and interactions in the space and a considerable time within the setting taking notes, a central practice of educational ethnography (Wargo et al., 2021:315). This phase of ethnographic research included observations and fieldnotes (See Section 3.6.3), auditing the Classroom Book Collection to establish the participants access to children’s literature in school (See Section 3.6.5) and reviewing holiday book audits to gain sightings of what the children were reading beyond the classroom (See Section 3.6.6).

This period also saw the behind-the-scenes development of Scrapbooks (See Section 3.7.5 and on) which were used in the later participatory element of the research as catalysts for child conferencing

activities. In addition, semi structured interviews (See Section 3.6.4) were conducted with the teaching professionals and questionnaires given to the parents/carers/guardians of the child participants.

3.6.3 Observations and Fieldnotes

These detailed observations of the social and cultural context of the research are typical with any small-scale ethnographic study that explores the lived experiences of participants in an educational setting (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010:277). This observation phase, as outlined by Siraj-Blatchford (2010:277), involved inferences being made about what was going on over a period of time (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). This was followed by more focussed observations offering clarity and confirming initial interpretations. As part of the observational aspect, I kept field notes written in the moment that captured the expressions, excitement and sometimes disappointment that I observed, allowing '*sparks of understanding*' and time to think through what had been witnessed (Rock, 2001:35).

These notes became a record of my thoughts and were subsequently used as part of the mosaic of data offering comparative and contrasting data (Kay & Wainwright, 2019). Some of these informal observation notes are included in the later chapters and there are examples given in the next chapter with regards to some of the '*literacy events*' (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8) that took place during the participatory phase of the research. These observable events were either initiated by the children, the teaching professionals, or myself, and are included in the final chapters to illustrate specific points or themes where literacy had a key role.

Initial observations of the physical space of the classroom were that there were zoned areas used for writing, mathematics, construction, play and reading (although I observed that the testing of reading skills took place throughout the setting, as I discuss later) and there was also a kitchen area which was used as a recreational space and had a large table in the centre. The zoned areas were also perceived by the children as task orientated spaces, and so were regulated by regimes of discipline, boundaries, learning and development. Chris Jenks (2005:75) states that these are inherently associated with '*modes of control*', which '*fashion a child's experience of that space*' (Jenks, 2005:74). There appeared to be a shared understanding between the children and staff that the kitchen area was a more fluid space than the others, that it was liminal and associated with play and pleasure, as well as being the designated space for morning breaks with fruit and milk.

Given this idea of the kitchen as liminal, I made a conscious decision to locate the later participatory research activities in that space, thus attempting to carve out a more neutral environment to engage the children with the research. Additionally, I also came to use the outside space for the later activities on the recommendation of the children. They explained that it was somewhere they enjoyed being without

having the rigours of organised lessons and close supervision, again suggesting it was a more neutral space. I adopted the use of these spaces to consciously attempt to undermine my perceived authority as an adult and relinquish part of my power as adult and researcher. This was deliberately done to empower the children as participants, to build the rapport essential in ethnographic studies (Geertz, 1973) and to create more private, less bound spaces (Stephenson & Prout, 2013) where the children were at ease when using qualitative research techniques (James, 2007), playing with ideas, and sharing their narratives (Clark & Moss, 2015).

3.6.4 Cultures of Communication

For children to actively engage and participate in this research project a choice had to be made between either engaging with the children from the position of an adult authority, which would surface issues of power and status, or adopting ways of communicating and interacting which resonated more with '*children's cultures of communication*' (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & James, 2017:2) (See Section 3.3). I chose the latter option, whilst being aware it was a challenge. My eventual acceptance into the children's community emphasised the importance of what Pia Christensen (2004:170) calls the '*practical engagement with the local cultural practices of communication.*' This approach of genuinely being present with the children and listening to their voices and experiences, helped me piece together a richer picture of the ways in which they communicated with each other and the relationships they established within their community of practice. These insights proved invaluable in terms of understanding the dynamics of the group and the sensitivities amongst specific children within the group in terms of reading. My ways of seeing children and childhood, therefore, have had a significant impact upon the ways in which I developed the conceptual framework for this research and how I went about capturing children's voices. What also struck me throughout my time in the setting was the sensitivity and genuine concern the children had about including me in their activities and explaining what they were doing, so ensuring that I did not feel left out. This suggests they allocated me an identity different from that of an authoritative adult. In addition, they were cognisant of my research agenda from the outset and as time passed seemed so familiar with the research that they began to anticipate when I might return to the research questions.

This attention to specific contextual practices and communications further supported the development of the research strategies (MacDonald, 2013), that see children as inhabiting an autonomous world with its own agenda and rules (Morrow & Richards, 2002). This is in line with the UNCRC (1989) which promoted the recognition of children as social actors rather than simply seen as part of family or school, as discussed in the previous chapter (Corsaro, 1997; Christensen & Prout, 2002). As also mentioned in the previous chapter, Articles Twelve and Thirteen of the UNCRC highlight and promote

children's involvement in decision making processes about their lives and that they should be informed, involved, and consulted. However, whilst Virginia Morrow and Martin Richards (2002) argue that there has been a significant movement towards researching children's views and opinions, they also state that these are not always foregrounded as a priority and that there is often little respect for children's voices and perspectives in everyday social life.

Developing dialogue and establishing trust was integral to the relationship between myself and the participants. However, I was conscious of Kalyani's Thurairajah (2019:134) concerns about familiarity and attempts to build rapport, as it may lead to unconscious and unintentional manipulation of the participants and dilemmas of power and status. These tensions, according to Kellett (2011:2) will always exist when trying to elicit children's views, even at the most informal level, due to the power dynamics at work and to social status, which is particularly pertinent in the '*authoritarian context of a school classroom.*' Going further, Spyros Spyrou (2011:151) argues that when researching with children,

...critical, reflexive researchers need to reflect on the processes which produce children's voices in research, the power imbalances that shape them and the ideological contexts which inform their production and reception, or in other words issues of representation' and reflecting upon voice and participation.

That said, there are inherent issues with regards power imbalances in research with children. For instance, when it comes to consent, the dominant discourse is that of young children lack agency, are vulnerable and not yet competent. These representations of children tend to endorse the notion of a caretaker (Archard, 2015) positioned as the only authority who can give consent for children to participate in the research project. Therefore, many research projects tend to garner adult 'caretaker' perspectives rather than children's, this being directly linked to the absence of children's voices in historical research about childhood.

Therefore, building and establishing research relationships over many weeks was done through working with the children in genuine ways and building their confidence, by listening to them reading (reading schemes), playing outside with them, and supporting the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum agendas in many different activities.

3.6.5 Classroom Book Collection

During my observational time in the setting, I felt a key task that needed to be undertaken was an audit of all the books in both the nursery and the reception class reading areas which would serve as baseline

research data (See Section 4.0.4). When I discussed these collections with the teaching staff, they mentioned that many of the books had either been left by previous cohorts of children or donated. It appeared from the discussion that the teachers were not involved in choosing the texts in the reading areas except for the books containing traditional tales that were being used as part of the National Curriculum agenda. Whilst acknowledging how busy the staff were, this also indicates the marginality of reading beyond the curriculum and reading scheme. Therefore, whilst the main reason for collating and auditing the classroom collections was to gain a better understanding of the texts that were on offer for the children to read, it also served to establish how wider reading was seen. Drawing together the list of what was available became a useful participatory tool, as the staff were then able to compare the list with the books the children chose to record in their Scrapbooks. This became a positive exercise in validating the children's engagement outside of the curriculum with reading, created new links between school and home reading, and built staff confidence and ownership regarding the school collections. Ultimately, in the future the teachers could use the Scrapbook data when purchasing new texts, thus reflecting the authors and books the children enjoyed reading.

3.6.6 Holiday Reading Audit

In addition to the Classroom Book Audit, the teaching staff allowed me access, with the children's permission, to a Holiday Reading Audit they had recently conducted. For this audit the children were asked to record their reading choices over a holiday period. This activity was initiated by the school, with the intention of monitoring children's reading to ensure they were continuing to read regularly when not at school. The audit was conducted by the children over sixteen days, where they were asked to record what and where they read. This activity was shared as part of the research project and offered insights into not only what the children were selecting to read but also who they chose to read with. It was aligned with the scrapbooking activity and helped me to get a sense of wider reading opportunities. Out of the fourteen children who fully completed a Scrapbook (although most of the others did engage with elements of it), ten also completed a reading audit during the holidays. The review of the classroom collection audit and holiday reading audit are used in Section 4.0.4 as comparators to reflect upon the data collected in the Scrapbooks and subsequent child conferencing.

3.7 Ethnographically Inflected Participatory Research

Following the initial stages of observation, audits, interviews and my subsequent initial development of the Scrapbooks, the research entered a participatory phase. The introduction of different kinds of research techniques were employed to both engage the '*children's interests and to exploit their particular talents and abilities*' in terms of reading for pleasure (James, 2007:252). These techniques

involved bringing artefacts into the research field to encourage the children participants to reflect upon their reading experiences in the past and their current expertise. The artefacts included picturebook covers, picturebooks and the researcher organised storytelling and literacy events as well the Scrapbooks and the children authoring a picturebook.

3.7.1 Disturbing the Field

From the start, I was aware that I needed to be mindful of what Mukherji and Albon (2015:86) describe as '*disturbing the field.*' The idea of disturbing the field in the context of this research project became twofold. Firstly, in relation to the way that the presence of '*outsiders*' in the classroom, in terms of their social relationships (Christensen, 2004), will inevitably change interactions and behaviours within that space. It proved impossible to avoid disturbing the field as my mere presence, even as an observer, within the setting triggered interest and conversations about 'what I was doing' and 'who I was' amongst the children (Mukherji & Albon, 2015: 86). This highlighted the importance of both acknowledging my own subjectivity and responding to questions about my motives and interest in an honest and open way. The second way of disturbing the field was the shift in research strategy from a holistic ethnographic approach of participant observation to an ethnographically inflected approach (that meaning influenced by my observations), that brought artefacts into the setting to be used as object elicitation and the literacy and storytelling events which were 'task-centred activities' (James et al., 1998:190) that sat outside the everyday practices of the setting. Although I was mindful that these research techniques could be perceived as problematically disturbing the field, their contribution to the research proved fruitful (as discussed below and in the later chapters).

3.7.2 Object Elicitation

Object elicitation was used in different ways during the later participatory aspects of the research. This was specifically to encourage discussion about what the children's favourite texts were. I worked with small groups of the children for this exercise. I shared a bag of full of copies of book covers with each group, asking if there were any they recognised, and particularly if any had been favourites, either currently or when they were younger. They sorted through them and told stories of when they read them, who they had read them with and if they still had them. The range of picture book covers used were of books that had featured in the Book Trust top books for children under five years old. These covers could be described as visual anchors that helped the children recognise a range of texts (Hazel, 1995).

However, whilst the Scrapbooks, discussed shortly, were created by the children and so were unique and personalised objects, the covers were pre-existing objects that I had selected. This is a different

kind of object elicitation precisely because it is researcher led. I therefore remained mindful that this type of activity is potentially leading and may inadvertently regulate the participants so having an impact on the data (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The dilemma I faced was that the children might only choose the picturebooks presented in the activity, rather than the talk ranging beyond the immediate examples, potentially suppressing their spontaneity and/or creativity and consequently not truly representing their reading choices. This aspect of the research was considered at length, but my conclusion was that it was still a worthwhile activity. I adapted the activity by asking questions, in addition to sharing the covers, about whether there were other texts they would like to mention, or if what was there reminded them of other books, so ensuring that discussion always looked beyond the immediate and encouraging them to think about what they had also seen and engaged with in school, at home, or in the local public library.

A final aspect of object elicitation came about due to the child conferencing discussions outlined below. One aspect of the discussions focused on authorship, which led to the children and I deciding to develop a picturebook as part of the project. Like the Scrapbooks it was generated during the project and served as a participatory tool that reflected the children's ability to create a narrative arc through storytelling and design. They also developed imagery and wrote the narrative in their own handwriting. The book generated discussion that moved beyond the book into the wider world of children's literature.

3.7.3 Literacy Events & Storytelling

The literacy events were storytelling and book sharing activities that could be perceived as a form of object elicitation intended to garner responses about how one reads a picturebook and how picturebooks work. To support this type of activity I brought along a box of picturebooks which included many of their favourite books from their Scrapbooks whilst also introducing new picturebooks by some of the authors they had talked about.

3.7.4 Picturebooks as Object Elicitation

As noted in the Introduction, a workshop for the children's parents/carers/guardians was organised by the teaching team, in part to introduce the research project and myself as researcher. The workshop was designed to answer questions about the project, to clarify any aspects of the research agenda and to ask the parents to consider whether they would allow their children to participate. During this workshop, the parents completed a questionnaire which mirrored the questions contained in the Scrapbook so eliciting the adult's memories of their childhood reading (See Appendix 1).

In addition, the technique of object elicitation was also used during these workshop activities but rather than using book covers, a wide range of picturebooks created in the decades from the 1960s onward were used. This too fulfilled the purpose of this workshop in eliciting responses to their own reading history and the activity allowed them time and space to consider their young selves as readers which supported the completion of the project questionnaires.

3.7.5 Scrapbooking

It was only once the children were familiar with me and comfortable with my presence in the classroom, something established during the observational aspect of the research, that I introduced the participatory Scrapbooks, a key part of the research method developed specifically for this project to gain insights into the children's reading histories and experiences. The Scrapbooks were divided into three sections which reflected the three key questions I developed in response to the aims and objectives and Meek's questions for adults about reading (as noted in the Introduction). These questions were,

- What do the children enjoy reading now and in the past?
- Where do the children enjoy reading?
- Who do the children like to read with/if anyone? [My emphasis]

Although the emphasis in the research was predominantly about child participants' responses to these questions, part of the research agenda was also to gather practitioners and parents/carers/guardians' memories and reflections on reading for pleasure. Consequently, these questions also formed the foundation of the interview schedule used with the practitioners and that of the parent/carer/guardian questionnaires.

Reading and literacy in educational contexts, as discussed in the previous chapter, appear consistently in educational pedagogy. The child participants were cognisant of the imperative of learning to read and functional literacy within their classroom. Simply conducting discussions about reading in that space may have resulted in the children participants responding with what they thought would be appropriate in their academic context (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008). The incorporation of creative methods and use of participatory tools in terms of data collection moved away from a pure ethnographic approach. The Scrapbooks were not only unique in terms of data elicitation but were also an important practical and conceptual process when used as a catalyst for discussion that promoted '*saving, sharing, and making sense(s) of the everyday and ephemeral*' resulting in a positive participatory research experience (Walling-Wefelmeyer, 2021:3).

Scrapbooking was chosen as a precursor to the child conferencing group activities, which on their own may have provided limited access to what Sara Bragg and David Buckingham (2008:2) call the '*emotional and symbolic aspects*' of the participants' experiences. Other research using this approach confirms how useful this approach can be. For instance, Ros Walling-Wefelmeyer's (2021:5) research highlights that the activity of scrapbooking problematises the '*easy reading we demand of people and experiences, offering scraps salvaged from everyday life as orientation points in multifaceted sense-making processes.*' This conceptualisation of Scrapbooks reflects how the children's completed books were littered with 'scraps' of memories and storytelling which, during the child conferencing group discussions, acted as starting points to explore their everyday life and make sense of their own reading narratives. Going further, the scrapbook brought the children's voices into the project in more diverse ways (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008:4), and, in the role of 'scrapbookers' who are storytellers, the children had some autonomy and a degree of power (Medley-Rath, 2016:87).

The process of completing their Scrapbooks, Bragg & Buckingham (2008:3) argue is a 'private' and individual form of communication (Walling-Wefelmeyer, 2021:3). In contrast, the subsequent child conferencing discussions surfaced peer pressure and competitiveness to a certain extent, as they were seen as more formal arenas. This will be discussed further in the final chapters. The introduction of scrapbooking offered the children the space to develop their ideas in their own time, in a relaxed environment where they could choose what they shared. Thus, creative production has the potential to enable identity work and can be seen as empowering for children (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008).

3.7.6 Construction of the Scrapbooks

The Scrapbooks were designed and structured into three distinct, but interrelated sections aligned to the aims and objectives of the research agenda and translated into the three questions I had adapted from Meek's (1988) work, mentioned previously. Section One was based on the question 'what do the children enjoy reading now and in the past?' and was designed to elicit children's reading histories. Here the children were encouraged to record what they had enjoyed reading when they were younger as well as their current reading choices. Section Two was based on the question 'where do the children enjoy reading?' and was designed to explore where the children participants enjoyed reading and presented the opportunity for the children to explain what they thought their ideal reading space would look like. Another aspect of the Mosaic approach was mapping (Clark & Moss, 2015), with the children having the opportunity to draw maps of key spaces both at home and school. Section Three was based on the question 'who do the children like to read with/if anyone?' and was designed to explore the possibility of reading as a community, or solitary activity.

Each section offered the children space to write, draw, stick and design whatever they wanted. All thirty-nine children were offered the opportunity to complete a Scrapbook, which they could choose to do at home or at school. The children engaged with this activity in different ways. Some chose to engage members of their families to support them in the development, whereas others chose to complete them independent of their parents or siblings. Either way, the Scrapbook entries the children chose to include were deemed as important data and classed as making their voices visible. Whilst not all the children completed the Scrapbooks fully, even the partially completed ones offered useful insights. This idea of voice extended to tailoring and individualising the covers of their Scrapbooks with drawings, stickers, ribbons etc, which represented their ownership of the artefact. I share a few indicative examples in Figure 12. As the Scrapbooks were being completed in the child conferencing discussions with friends, they became the focus of participant-generated object elicitation which typically relied on participants talking about the objects they have selected or, in this case, created (Gibson, 2019). Besides the advantages mentioned above, the method empowered participants to talk about what is important to them.

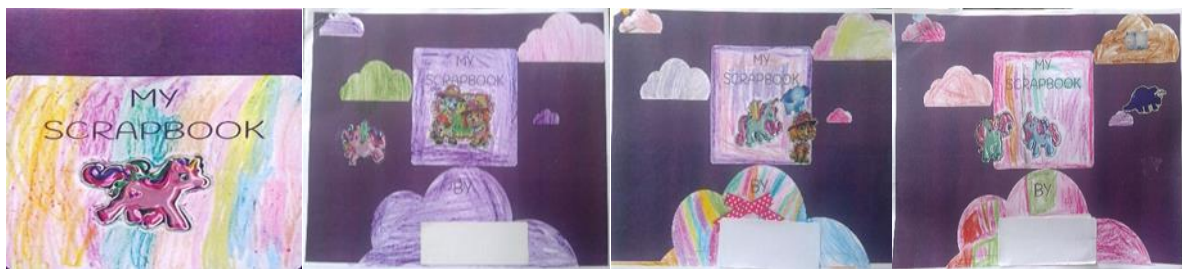


Figure 12. Scrapbook Covers

3.7.7 Scrapbooks and Child Conferencing

During the completion of the Scrapbooks, the children were asked to participate in conferencing group discussions about the aspects of the books they were completing. Child conferencing offers a more formal structured environment for talking to children as participants. It is defined by Clark and Moss (2015:18) as an active child-focussed process and is an integral part of the Mosaic approach. I also used the tell me approach during group discussions (Chambers, 1996).

During child conferencing I used the children's Scrapbooks to ask them about some of the images and confirm what they had drawn, the books they had chosen to include and the spaces they like to read in both at home and in school. Flexibility was important during these discussions in terms of location and participation (Clark & Moss, 2015) since some children preferred to discuss their Scrapbooks outside. Prior to these discussions an assent discussion took place to ensure the children felt able and willing to engage with the conferencing and have their words recorded (Oulton et al., 2016).

Beyond the Scrapbook activities, child conferencing was also used when discussing more traditional reading practices. During my time at the setting, I was frequently asked to listen to children reading and record their progress in their reading records. These reading activities generated conversations about how stories work about what they like to read. As a result, I spent time telling stories to small groups of children either using their favourite books from the classroom or introducing new picturebooks by some of the authors they talked about in their Scrapbooks. These conversations captured insights into the children's understanding of the complexities of how a narrative works and initiated talk about authorship. With regard to narrative, during these storytelling events the children would interrupt with their own predictions, or their own versions of what happened if they were familiar with the narrative, and shared memories of who they had read the story with or indeed to (See Section 4.1.7). An element of storytelling was revealed in that these children were confident in interpreting the narrative and sharing their opinions with the group. Thus, they supported each other and allowed each other freedom of expression which empowered them to make complex and thoughtful observations about reading. These small group discussions about authorship presented opportunities for the child conferencing discussions too. It was during these conversations the children discussed ideas about being an author as well as who their favourite authors were. Storytelling and authorship were important to the project as the totality of the research was predicated on children telling stories about their reading journeys, thus authoring their own narrative. During the research process there were more than twenty child conferencing group discussions recorded in addition to the Scrapbook entries. Consequently, using this method resulted in a substantial amount of data being collected.

3.7.8 Barthes Revisited.

Given the project focus on children, books and reading, the work of Barthes (1974:3) is useful to clarify the nature of the participants' engagement with texts. These ideas are powerful in terms of understanding ideas in research are aligned to a constructivist/interpretative paradigm that perceives research participants as capable, competent individuals who can author their own realities and experiences of reading. Barthes' term, '*readerly*' texts (see 2.3.4) (Barthes 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631) can be seen as positioning and constructing the child as consumer of the author's product and passive in the process, something aligned with ideas of vulnerability and naivety (discussed in the Literature Review). This reflects some contemporary and historical dominant discourses about children and reading. This is contrasted with '*writerly*' texts (Barthes 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631) which position the child as able to produce a '*plurality of meanings which goes beyond the logical or psychological construction of the text*' and actively participating in establishing meanings.

This latter concept is aligned to more contemporary constructs or versions of the child reader closely linked with ideas of children as powerful, agentic, and meaning makers, as the Scrapbooks, in particular, reflect.

3.7.9 Semi-structured Interviews

To move on to the adult participants, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Reception and Nursery Teachers and School Literacy Lead. Semi-structured interviews use a set of questions but allow for variations and productive straying off track (Kay & Wainwright, 2019). This type of interview is a middle ground between unstructured interviews that have almost no limits or boundaries and structured interviews where questions are fixed and unchanging (Kay & Wainwright, 2019), offering little or no flexibility. Semi-structured interviews were used for this project because of the flexibility they offer to enable the interviewer to expand upon topics and to clarify any misunderstandings to ensure the participants have understood what is being asked (Kay & Wainwright, 2019). This means that they offer space to check and confirm data, so enhancing validity and trustworthiness (Kay & Wainwright, 2019:143). During the interviews, I was careful to ensure that the participants' views were illuminated, and that the data was not shaped or unduly influenced by my own biases and preconceptions (Kay & Wainwright, 2019). The intent was to establish findings that reflected the phenomenon studied and genuinely represented the voices of the participants. This was achieved through careful interview planning and processes (Edwards & Holland, 2013). There was a major challenge, however, in finding mutually convenient times where they would be able to dedicate about half an hour to an individual interview, as the demands of teaching time were unrelenting, and every minute was dedicated to specific pedagogic activities. This issue was overcome by arranging to arrive at the setting before the children arrived and interviewing the teaching staff in the classroom. The Mosaic approach outlines the combination of traditional methods of observation, with designing and drawing, writing, child conferencing, literacy events storytelling, and semi-structured interviews, as shown in Figure 13.



Figure 13. Research Methods

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Historically, research ethics in the social sciences were predominantly based on the *'patient protection model of medical research'* (Open University, 2020:n.p.). More recently, this focus broadened in scope to include, according to the Economic and Social Research Council Online (ESCR, 2020), the *'benefits, risks and harms to all persons connected with and affected by the research and to the social responsibilities of researchers.'* In the broadest sense, the term ethics, embodies the rules that govern researcher conduct in every aspect of the research process. To this end, ethical research, from my perspective, is concerned with what *'researchers ought and ought not to do in their research and research behaviour'* (Cohen et al., 2017:111). This part of the chapter, therefore, outlines how ethics underpin this project, focusing on the ways I attempted to respect and of course relate to the children's alterity, which is fundamental in early years educational practice, where *'the other'* is made into the same, aligned to the notion of *'ethical symmetry'*, something which is discussed later (Moss, 2001; Christensen & Prout, 2002:482).

When researching with individuals there are always tensions and areas of ambiguity in terms of interpreting what is ethical and best practice. There is no formulaic response to these tensions and

challenges and as a researcher I have had to rely on my moral compass and understanding of ethical principles to steer and inform the decisions I have had to make throughout this research project. Thus, whilst ethical questions and considerations formed a significant part of the thinking involved in the development of this research project, the process of reflecting upon ethical considerations has been fundamental to all aspects of the project from inception through to completion (ESCR, 2020). Consequently, this research study is explicitly in-depth, personal, and reflective and has clear boundaries, these being pivotal to working with the children as participants, as well as with practitioners and parents/carers/guardians.

The initial part of this discussion of ethics pertains more to procedural ethics and matters concerning ethical rules and codes. To this end, this project was conducted in line with the *Northumbria University Principles of Good Research Practice* where clear codes of practice align to the principles of the UK Research Integrity Office. The university *Research Ethics and Governance Handbook* emphasises that,

‘all staff and students are expected to ensure that their conduct is driven by the ethical imperative of respect, the intent to do no harm and to contribute to society’s knowledge and practice through engagement in research that has beneficence intent’ (Northumbria University, 2019:2).

In addition, ethical principles outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) also played a key role in the development of my application to the Northumbria University Ethics Committee. BERA (2018:2) *‘strives to be inclusive of the diversity of educational research and scholarship’* and emphasises that ethics is an active process, stating that:

‘We recommend that at all stages of a project – from planning through conduct to reporting – educational researchers undertake wide consultation to identify relevant ethical issues (...) This means that ethical decision-making becomes an actively deliberative, on-going and iterative process’ (BERA, 2018:2).

Applying for ethical approval involved demonstrating that ethical principles were at the heart of the project and that I had taken every eventuality and potential consequence into consideration. In indicating this, I included information letters for the school gatekeeper, parents, practitioners, and an information sheet for the child participants (See Appendix 2). In addition, a risk assessment was carried out in the educational setting in line with Northumbria University Principles of Good Research

Practice. Having gained ethical approval, the process of working ethically meant I was mindful and reflective throughout the project, both whilst working in the setting and when writing the thesis.

3.8.1 Reflexivity of ‘self’

As a lecturer and researcher, I have an ongoing interest in the history and development of children’s reading, the concept of reading for pleasure and debates and dilemmas about children’s use of space relative to reading. This research, then, is the culmination of my interests. In the Literature Review I discussed how four key disciplines informed my thinking. Similarly, the methodological choices are aligned to the social constructivist theoretical frameworks of these disciplines, with a particular focus on the social construction of childhood and rights discourses. It is essential to recognise and address issues around subjectivity that are inherent in qualitative research, from design, implementation, and interpretation and this is done through reflexivity (Roulston, 2010). My own ongoing reflexivity makes explicit my own disciplinary background and interests and the backstage or behind the scenes aspects of the research which demonstrate and make visible the tacit knowledge and decisions about the research process which are often concealed from the reader, reflecting a commitment to reliability/dependability (Hesse-Biber, 2013) (See Section 3.9). Further, without recognising the position of the researcher during the research and being reflexive about influence, power and bias, the quality of the data that is collected may be compromised, something which will be further evident in the interpretation of that data.

The primary purpose of questioning my role in this qualitative research through reflexivity is *‘to acknowledge and interrogate the constitutive role of the researcher in research design, data collection, analysis and knowledge production’* (Hsiung, Ping-Chun, 2008:212). At a personal level, reflexivity is therefore critical and requires an acknowledging of self (Bryman, 2004). It is defined by Roni Berger (2013:2) as *‘the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome.’* According to Sumathi Renganathan (2009) constructing and influencing are dynamic processes in research. Therefore, those who conduct qualitative research regard themselves as *‘a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection, and interpretation of data’* (Finlay, 2002:212). The acknowledgement and transparency of this process adds validity and trustworthiness to research findings.

Research reflexivity demands that one constantly evaluates positionality and its potential impact on the research process. Renganathan (2009) states that there is no question as to whether a researcher should engage with reflexivity in their research endeavour, only a question of how and to what degree.

This is seen as wholly dependent on the aims and focus of any given research project (Finlay, 2002). Renganathan (2009) also points out that just saying you are being reflexive is not enough. Developing this dynamic process of reflexivity is an iterative process, involving recognition of my personal influence and my epistemological reflexivity.

This was also due to the project philosophy being that of interpretivism, and so my positionality has constantly been deliberated and considered within the research. This philosophy required me to question myself and my role as a researcher, as well as my understanding of the research processes and choices in terms of research design. Thus, reflexivity has played a significant role in not only the design and undertaking of the research itself but also in terms of holding and sharing data, the data analysis, writing up of this thesis and the dissemination of findings (ESCR, 2020). The research process, therefore, incorporated a '*continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation*' of my positionality as a researcher, as well as an '*active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome*' (Berger, 2013:2).

3.8.2 Complexities inherent in ethical researching with young children

Running parallel to the main methodological choices and methods used, then, was a review of the central issues relating to ethics and engagement when researching with young children (MacDonald, 2013; Flewitt, 2005; Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Tisdall et al., 2009). Whilst they should be considered in the same light as adults in terms of ethical symmetry, as Section 3.8.3 points out, in the initial stages of applying for ethics approval, and so at the start of the construction of the project, the differences between social constructions of adults and children were flagged up and had to be addressed.

This exploration was indicated as needful by the way that the research project was defined by the University as high risk because it involved working with this age group. In the ethics application documentation that the University had developed children were inherently categorised as vulnerable. Although the application passed successfully, this view of young children (itself a social construction of childhood) was an indication that as a researcher I needed to be very much more cognizant of ethical questions and considerations than if the research had been exclusively with adults (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

This need for exploration is additionally indicated by the findings of the Ethical Research Involving Children Project (ERIC), which outlined three crucial ethical considerations when researching with children in particular: informed consent, concerns about manipulation and notions of power

differentials. This suggests that ethics can be the main disparity between researching with children and with adults (Punch, 2002).

There was also, during this research project, a need to acknowledge ethical issues in terms of individual adults' constructs of the child, the context of education and home in relation to power dynamics, and the role of the teaching professional and their practice. This means that throughout the research design, implementation, and analysis several ethical dilemmas surfaced that were an integral part of the complexity of the research (BERA, 2018). Although challenging, these dilemmas were not a hurdle, but facilitated integrity as part of robust research processes, as I show in the following discussion.

3.8.3 Ethical Symmetry

This participatory research (Pickard, 2007) provided opportunities to capture children's voices whilst they explored their reading choices (McIntyre, 2008). Engaging children as co-constructors of knowledge has long been a contested subject and in this case that did raise ethical issues aligned to competency and age. However, this project is predicated on the idea that children are capable and competent participants who are able to share their experiences and their comprehension of the adult world (James & James, 2012). Therefore, methodologically, for this project children are seen the same as adults in terms of the value of their voices. Consequently, the chosen research methods and tools could equally be used with adults, forming an '*ethical symmetry*' (Christensen & Prout, 2002:478).

The concept of '*ethical symmetry*' as outlined by Christensen and Prout (2002:482) takes the stance that '*the ethical relationship between researcher and informant is the same whether he or she conducts research with adults or with children.*' This position is particularly pertinent to this project as it implies a relationship of respect in which age is not the defining factor, but rather societal participation, ownership, and agency are.

James and Prout's (1997) tenets of the new paradigm of Childhood Studies, already discussed in Section 2.1 as part of the research theoretical framework, are relevant here. Tenet 4 is particularly significant in terms of ethical symmetry as it argues that

children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes (James & Prout, 1997:8-9).

Broadly speaking this project was bound by the idea of participation and agency, with the children helping to direct aspects of the research, including sharing ideas about authorship, ownership and the

location of activities, and so was deliberately aligned to ethical symmetry. An example of how ownership was involved, the Scrapbooks, rich research artefacts used as catalysts to start discussions with regards to reading choices, were completed by the participating children and so, in line with ownership as discussed by Cathy Malchiodi (1998), I returned them at the end of the data collection process (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005), although I did scan the Scrapbooks to retain electronic copies. Beyond the ethics of ownership of the physical object, these Scrapbooks were a reading record that the participant children would reflect upon when they were older, and I felt this was important. The idea of ownership also extended to the authored book the children produced, which is now informally published and includes the name of each child involved in its making. Copies were presented to each participating child when I left the school, and several copies were integrated into the school reading resources.

3.8.4 Research Transparency & Consent

Obtaining consent from children and parents/carers was central to the research relationship, signalling respect for the dignity of all the research participants, their capability to express their views in line with the UNCRC (1989) and their right to have their voice heard. The age of the younger participants meant informed consent needed careful consideration. This also meant, as part of this process, that it was important to provide *'sufficient and appropriate information about the research, to allow participants to make a meaningful choice about whether or not to take part'* (ESCR, 2020). Involvement in this research was only agreed when the prospective participants were able to make informed and free decision without explicit or implicit coercion (ESCR, 2020).

3.8.5 Informed Consent

Informed consent is an explicit agreement that involves all participants understanding the research and being fully informed of the research aims, objectives and expectations. This consent must be given voluntarily, be recorded (ESCR, 2020), and be renegotiable, so ensuring participants can withdraw at any stage of the research process (ERIC, 2020). It was my intention to gain permission from the teaching professionals and parents/guardians/carers during the workshop at the beginning of the project (See Section 1.5.1) and so I developed an Information Sheet for that session (See Appendix 3 and Appendix 4). The Information Sheet for parents was written in an accessible and comprehensive format and included information about their children's involvement in the project. Appendix 3 also contains the information sheet for the teaching professionals outlining the project aims, objective and scope. Time was allowed for parents/guardians/carers and prospective participants to consider and ask any questions, so ensuring informed consent was achieved. However, whilst all the

parents/guardians/carers who attended the workshop gave permission for their child to take part in the research, I had to rely on the school to send the information sheet and consent form to the other parents via the children's schoolbook bags, which proved to be quite an unreliable route to contact them, although some additional parents did sign and return them.

When working with young children as participants, informed consent could be seen as problematic as it is traditionally perceived as the domain of adulthood. The legal position of consent is that it is a decision given by someone who is perceived to be competent and have an adequate understanding of the implications of their decision to participate. The context of the research deemed that adult consent was needed for each child participant for the research to go ahead. All the same, the idea of consent was problematic for me as a researcher in terms of my own positionality and because the ethos and philosophy of this research project was about foregrounding children's perspectives of their own personal experiences of reading with a goal of achieving ethical symmetry. I perceived the prospective child participants as agentic, competent, and capable of making decisions and giving consent themselves (See Section 2.2). Therefore, the necessity to gain consent from the children's guardians militated against my own ideas of participation and agency in terms of the children's capabilities.

Consequently, although consent was provided by adults, I also designed an Information Sheet (See Appendix 2) for the prospective child participants to inform them about the project, aims, objectives and scope, highlighting that they could change their minds about participating at any point without having to give a reason. I felt this aspect of consent was extremely important given the power dynamic that already exists within educational settings between children and adults. Thus, in the end consent forms were signed by parents/guardians/carers of the children participants as well as the teaching professionals and the structure and research approach was deemed as appropriate and supported both the children and adult participants. In addition, in line with my framework, I also held ongoing assent conversations with the child participants, reflecting the belief that researcher engagement '*should be on-going, rather than a single discrete event*' (Oulton et al., 2016:590).

3.8.6 Assent Conversations

Assent conversations, according to Kate Oulton et al., (2016:589), are a '*valuable educative process*' that fosters open discussion to establish trust and reduce the risk of coercion (Oulton et al., 2016). Assent conversations took place with the child participants throughout the research. The project information was reiterated during the process to the children so they could make an informed decision about continuing to take part in the research activities. This ensured principles of justice and the

obligation that the research must treat all individuals equally and fairly. Another aspect of consent that needed to be discussed was the need to make explicit the limits of confidentiality. Having read the Information Sheet (Appendix 2), which covered this topic, and chatted to me about any concerns or clarification needed the children would then decide whether to engage with the research activities or not.

In terms of consent and research in general it is the relationship that is established between the *'qualitative researcher and their participants that is perhaps the most important to the work'* (Thurairajah, 2019:134). This is certainly true in terms of ensuring ongoing consent and assent conversations with children. As mentioned in Section 3.6.4, *'children's cultures of communication'* (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & James, 2017:2) were important to consider in terms of ensuring the children understood consent and confidentiality. Genuinely *'being present,'* tuning in and listening to with children's voices was essential to ensure I had a clear understanding when children were discussing participation (Christensen, 2004).

3.8.7 Confidentiality & Anonymity

Throughout this thesis the participants' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality was achieved, thus respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the children, parents/guardians/carers and teachers (ERIC, 2020; Taylor, 2010). Close consideration was paid to the aspects of confidentiality outlined by ERIC (2020:np) including,

...privacy with regard to how much information the child wants to reveal or share, and with whom; privacy in the processes of information gathering/data collection and storage that allows the exchange of information to be confidential to those involved; and privacy of the research participants so that they are not identifiable in the publication and dissemination of findings.

Consequently, in addition to anonymity, all research data was stored securely electronically, for no longer than necessary, on a password protected laptop fulfilling the legal requirements of the Data Protection Act (2018). I also ensured that the research data was *'used in a way that is adequate, relevant and limited to only what is necessary'* (Data Protection Act, 2018: n.p.).

3.9 Research Validity/Credibility

The following section covers how I ensured validity and credibility. Qualitative researchers tend to be an integral part of the data collection process in their research, and this is certainly true of this project.

Questions about reliability translate into one specific question: *'if someone else did the research, would he or she have got the same results and arrived at the same conclusions?'* (Denscombe, 2017:327).

Reflecting upon this question there is no real way of knowing or being certain. However, there are ways of demonstrating reliability/dependability by making explicit research procedures and decisions which can be evaluated by other researchers as reputable and reasonable and subsequently replicable (Denscombe, 2017). With this information, it may be possible that another researcher could reach comparable findings and conclusions (Denscombe, 2017:327). Ultimately, the research processes must be open for audit. This can only be achieved if the researcher demonstrates a fully reflexive account of their understanding of the methods and procedures by making explicit the lines of enquiry that led to specific conclusions.

Good quality data is crucial to the reliability and validity of any research project, as any doubts cast on the validity of a data will therefore impact on the credibility of the research findings and could also raise ethical concerns (Denscombe, 2017). Credibility of data collection and analysis is often connected to with ideas of replicating aspects of the research process. This is predominantly linked to quantitative research rather than qualitative research, as there are two key reasons why replicating qualitative research is challenging. The first challenge is in terms of recreating a social setting and the second is the intimate relationship the researcher has with the research project data with regards interpreting data and drawing conclusions (Denscombe, 2017).

Consequently, these competing views of how validity and credibility are understood is dependent on the research paradigm chosen (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). Validity, therefore, according to Mac Naughton et al., (2010:162) in qualitative research *'is a matter of being able to offer as sound a representation of the field of study as the research methods allow.'* Rather than offering probable generalisability, qualitative research findings are judged on the extent to which the research data has captured key or important elements of the remit of the study and the analysis/interpretation has been carried out with integrity (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). When addressing issues of accuracy and appropriateness of qualitative data Martyn Denscombe (2017: 326) highlights steps to consider, which are respondent validation, the use of grounded data and triangulation. All three were employed in this project.

Regarding respondent validation, Denscombe (2010) states that it is a means by which the researcher checks the data and findings with the participants for factual accuracy. As I was ensconced in the setting for some time, I was able to organise opportunities to clarify points when needed, although

time constraints meant arranging a meeting with the adults before teaching began, rather than breaking the flow of the school day. Further, the Mosaic approach meant that I returned to the phenomena many times with the children but using a range of different methodological tools, as I discuss more below. In both cases this allowed my understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the children participants to be verified (Denscombe, 2017: 326). Grounded data was inherently part of the research, as qualitative research findings are grounded in fieldwork, with the researcher spending long periods for time in a setting or context. This enables the build-up of detailed analysis of text and/or visual images (Denscombe, 2017:327). Credibility, then, is established and reinforced by providing and demonstrating a robust basis for the conclusions (Denscombe, 2017).

Denscombe's (2017) final element is triangulation. Taking a Mosaic approach was deliberate as it enabled me to get a better '*fix*' on what was under investigation from a range of vantage points (Denscombe, 2017:167; Mac Naughton et al., 2010). The rationale for using a range of methods owes much to the concept of triangulation, a process by which a range of data is gathered to understand the topic in more complex ways to enable a complete picture from more than one perspective (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). Triangulation has been adapted and developed by many social researchers drawing on the original work of Norman K. Denzin (1970). These adaptations and developments comprise of five distinct ways in which triangulation can be used, described by Denscombe as '*methodological triangulation (between methods)*,' '*methodological triangulation (within methods)*,' '*data triangulation (contrastingly sources of information)*,' '*Investigator triangulation (different researchers)*' and '*theory triangulation (more than one theoretical position)*' (2017:169).

This project incorporated multiple triangulations from the forms above, most notably, '*methodological triangulation (within methods)*,' and '*data triangulation (contrastingly sources of information)*' (Denscombe, 2017:169). That this project used a Mosaic approach meant that many of the research methods were similar rather than markedly different and were aligned to each other. There is a suggestion, as Denscombe asserts, that when using '*methodological triangulation (within methods)*' similar research methods produce similar results so the conclusion can be drawn that the findings are authentic, which links to validity and reliability (Denscombe, 2017; Mac Naughton et al., 2010). Data triangulation was also used with different sources of information from varied informants, those being the children, parents/carers/guardians, and professionals (Denscombe, 2017:169). This element of triangulation allowed comparisons between the different voices in the project (Denscombe, 2017). Data was also gathered at different times and in two phases, which added an additional form of triangulation. Further, different contexts incorporated during the research project drew together a kind

of ‘*space triangulation*,’ which involved comparing the contexts of home and school (Denscombe, 2017:169).

Finally, another of these forms of triangulation was incorporated, ‘*theoretical triangulation*’, which involved using more than one theoretical position when collecting and interpreting the data (Denscombe, 2017:169). This is suggested in the way that from the outset the project drew on several disciplinary approaches in setting out to explore children’s relationships with books and reading. In conclusion, triangulation can assist in the pursuit for richer data, thus reducing or attempting to reduce bias (Mac Naughton et al., 2010).

3.10 Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this project was complex and as Pam Dewis and Janet Kay (2019:197) remind us there is ‘*no single or ideal way of doing qualitative analysis*.’ The intention of this project was to tell what Mac Naughton et al. (2010) define as a ‘*well substantiated story*’ that illuminates what matters most from the research, that of hearing children’s experiences of reading for pleasure. The ‘*data collection ran concurrently with the data analysis*’ process (Johnson, Adkins & Chauvin, 2020:143) and began with participant’s conversations at the beginning of the data collection phase (Dewis & Kay, 2019) and continued until the final data set was collated.

As mentioned earlier the multiple research methods generated a significant amount of data in a range of formats. Piecing together these elements was the second part of the Mosaic approach and demanded analysis, reflection and interrogation using complex analysis focusing on linguistic, visual, and physical features (Ormerod & Ivanic, 2000; McIntyre, 2008; Childers, 2012). Data analysis, needed to be conducted in a ‘*precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis*’ in sufficient detail to allow the reader to decide if the process was credible and trustworthy (Nowell et al., 2017:1).

3.10.1 Data Analysis: An Epistemological Framework

To begin this discussion about data analysis there is a need to return to the research question, methodology and context of the research to ground and position this data analysis section. As mentioned, this research is anchored in educational research. It set out to understand children’s narratives with regards their reading experiences and histories in nursery and primary reception education and at home. Additionally, the research also worked with teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians to capture their own individual experiences of reading and reading histories as younger people, with a view to producing research that offers insights into the ways in which

children, teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians engage with the love of books and reading. As with any educational research these insights may help to inform practice and support the development and enhancement of reading for pleasure both in the classroom and in the home environment.

As mentioned earlier this study is situated in the interpretivist paradigm emphasizing the subjective and context-dependent nature of knowledge. A qualitative approach was adopted throughout the period of the project with ethnographic and participatory research phases. The ‘data corpus’ that emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006) comprised of observations of interactions in the setting, Scrapbook entries both visual and written, child participants’ informal discussion data around picturebooks and authorship, recordings of child conferencing activities about the Scrapbook entries, as well as ‘*task-centred activities*’ (James et al., 1998:190) such as recordings of ‘literacy events.’ While the practitioner, parent/guardian/carer data collected during this process was also part of the overall set, much of the data was drawn, written or spoken by the children participants and foregrounding this data was a priority for the research. The different types of research data gathered in this project took the form of:

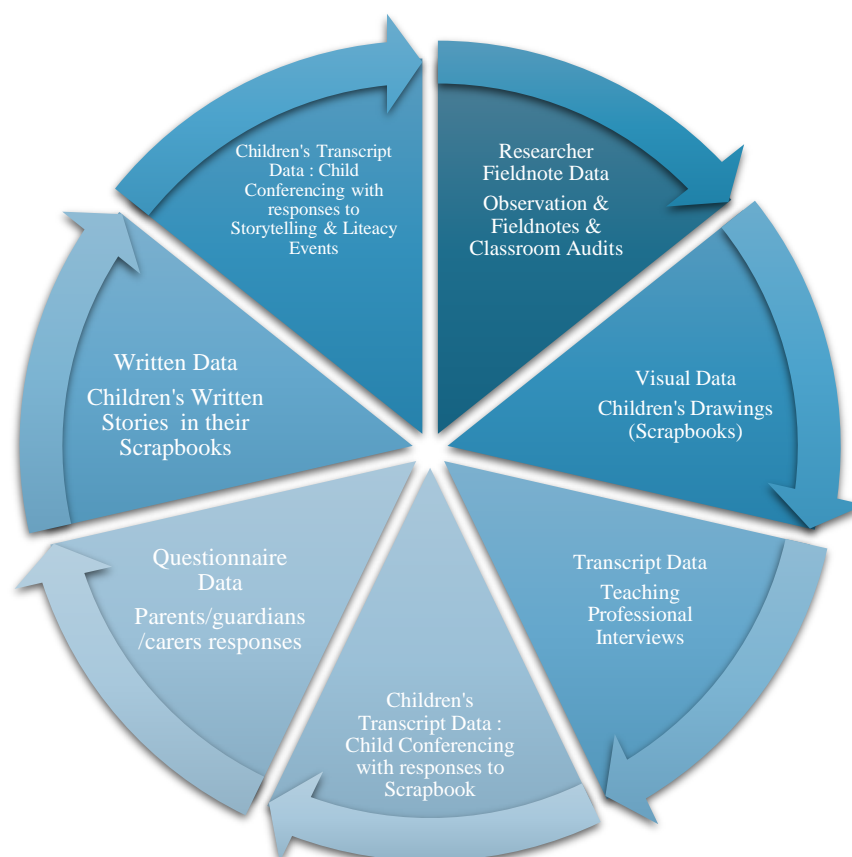


Figure 14. Types of Research Data

3.11 Data Analysis Process

Analysing this amount of raw data gathered during the project was a little overwhelming initially. However, to alleviate this, a systematic approach was developed and adopted to support with the method of data analysis so *'bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data...a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating'* process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:214), which Denscombe (2017) argues is integral to qualitative data analysis. This process was iterative and time-consuming and was not a neat or linear process (Dewis & Kay, 2019), but was creative and stimulating (Denscombe, 2017), and a *'rhizomatic'* process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:6). This iterative process demanded going back and forth and constantly refining and improving (Dewis & Kay, 2019; Childers, 2012).

3.11.1 Thematic Analysis: Reporting and Analysing Patterns

Having immersed myself in this data I began to identify potential themes that appeared to occur consistently throughout aspects of the data. This was an active process of discovering and identifying patterns/themes and concepts which were embedded throughout the data collection (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The process of *'pruning and refining'* (Dewis & Kay, 2019:205) the totality of data led to an established final data set that was to be included in the analysis. This approach focused on an inductive approach to data analysis mostly relating to generating *'a hypothesis rather than a deductive approach, associated with proving a hypothesis'* (Dewis & Kay, 2019:203). To make the task more manageable, given the quantity of data I was dealing with, I reviewed various data analysis approaches and opted to use the six-phase thematic analysis proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) as this was deemed a *'foundational method for qualitative analysis'* (Braun & Clarke, 2006:4). Thematic analysis is *'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within the data'* (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). It offered a degree of flexibility and a theoretically and methodologically based *'recipe'* for my qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006:4). Ultimately, this approach was aligned to the interpretivist paradigm that I had chosen, which required me to make my implicit or tacit assumptions more explicit. The thematic approach to analysis also required me to explain *'how'* I was going to analyse the data which according to Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001:386) is often omitted in research. Consequently, the following part of the chapter will outline my data analysis journey. However, this was not a straightforward or linear process, where you are unable to proceed to the next phase without completing the previous phase (Braun & Clark, 2006). Rather the analysis is a recursive process where phases overlap and blur. The following sections break the process down into Braun and

Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. This analysis was instrumental in translating, interpreting, and negotiating meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.11.2 Analysis Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data

Key to understanding the data was spending time listening to the interviews and informal discussion and revisiting my extensive fieldnotes. Regarding the spoken data the process was challenging at times due to multiple conversations overlapping during the more informal conversations with the children, therefore listening several times was essential in establishing who was speaking. During this phase of the data analysis there was also an element of informal analysis taking place, as mentioned earlier, that helped structure the conversations and interviews, whilst considering the depth and breadth of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This phase was dominated by the transcription of verbal data such as the informal conversations with the child participants and the interviews with the teaching practitioners. By transcribing them I became familiar with the data, an active process described as an interpretative act during which meanings are created and words are interpreted, rather than a simple mechanistic process of recording verbatim the spoken word (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). During this process it was essential to adopt a rigorous and thorough '*verbatim account*' of both verbal and non-verbal communication (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.11.2.1 Visual and Written Data: Children's Drawings and Stories in their Scrapbooks

Analysis of the Scrapbooks (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008) involved explicit interpretation of the function and meanings of these artefacts through conversational and narrative accounts and descriptions by the children participants. Many of the child conferencing conversations were stimulated by the Scrapbooks visual and written data acting as catalysts, prompts, stimuli, and visual anchors (Hazel, 1995). When working with the children during some of the data collection activities when they included an image or a story in their Scrapbooks, I asked questions such as 'tell me about the image you have drawn', 'why did you choose it and include it?', 'what does it mean to you?' This process helped to clarify and confirm their interpretation of the image, offering confirmability to the data and ensuring that my findings were derived from it. This process of '*pinning down the interpretation in the field is a powerful way into perception, belief and practice*' (Manning, 2001:156). Of course, these images and stories written and drawn in the Scrapbooks were also considered to be an important aspect of 'voice' and were incorporated into the final coded data.

In addition, I also referred to relevant observations and fieldnotes which reflected incidents and emotions observed throughout the data collection process to add to my understanding of the social and cultural context of the classroom.

3.11.2.2 Audit Data: Classroom Book Collection & Holiday Reading Audits

In some respects, this data was much more linear than that collected elsewhere in the research as it was an inventory of the texts available within the classroom and provided baseline data to offer a richer picture of the kinds of books the children had access to there. Although this data was recorded to demonstrate the nature of the classroom collection, it also proved useful when reflecting upon the data from the child participants about favourite books and characters recorded conversation and in their Scrapbooks. In addition, I carried out a review of a Holiday Reading Audit the classroom teacher had initiated, outlining the books the children chose to read during their Spring holiday period. For this audit I recorded all book titles, and the data offered insights into the reading the child participants did beyond the classroom.

Writing and mapping also played a key role at this point (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through my beginning to work on the potential coding schemes. This continued throughout the analysis process. As well as reading through the whole data set to begin coding, I am aware that my ideas and identification of possible themes were being shaped as I read through, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest will happen. Whilst foregrounding the children's voices, when reviewing all types of data, the observations and fieldnotes collated during the actual data collection were an integral part of the process.

Guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive, reflective thematic analysis was used to analyse the responses across the various methodologies. Overall, there was a lot of overlap and similarity, so the data was approached as one integrated set of data rather than separately.

3.11.3 Analysis Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

This analysis phase began once I was familiar with the data and generated ideas which I decided were important and of interest. This phase involved developing codes from the data and organising them into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes differ from the overarching themes which are often much broader. Codes classify an aspect of the data, semantic content (relating to meaning in language) or latent (existing but not yet developed or manifest or even hidden or concealed). There are several software packages to code qualitative data including NVIVO, but due to the nature of the research and the visual aspects of some parts of the data this was not a particularly fruitful approach. Instead, the coding process was carried out using paper-based copies of the raw data,

which allowed me to code using coloured highlighter pens and ‘post it’ notes. I also re-read the transcripts and highlighted sections of text and identified broad codes in specific colours, with the codes noted in a list which identified where the extracts occurred in the transcripts. This process also included reference to observations and fieldnotes recorded at the time of the events to add context to the discussion. A final aspect was to remain mindful of accounts that were not aligned to the emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:23) and that I should retain them.

3.11.4 Analysis Phase 3: Searching for Themes

The data was coded throughout Analysis Phase 2 and a list made identifying different codes across the whole data set. In Analysis Phase 3 this was followed by sorting the codes into possible themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, when reviewing the coded data, extracts of raw data were identified within the themes, as well as how specific coded data could be combined to form overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The initial coding and sorting into overarching themes helped me identify main themes and subthemes and later assisted my gauging of the significance of the individual themes in terms of the research agenda, aims and objectives. Moreover, during this iterative process I needed to consider whether the themes could be ‘*combined, refined, separated or even discarded*’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:22).

3.11.5 Analysis Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Reviewing and refining the chosen themes forms the basis of Analysis Phase 4 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is a process that involves several levels of activity. The first level was about reviewing the coded data extracts, which involved reading and re-reading all the extracts collated for each theme and potential subthemes, with a view to considering if they appeared to form coherent patterns. This involved my considering each theme individually and deciding if there was a coherent pattern, or whether the coded quotes did not fit or the theme itself was problematic. I went through this process a number of times as there were what I felt might be anomalies in my data, such as when the children participants veered onto completely different topics or began to elaborate on the story or create their own stories, and because some of the coded extracts that I had previously considered as important did not fit into any of the emergent categories and therefore needed to be considered as part of a new theme or possibly even discarded (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The next level was about deciding whether the individual themes ‘*identified ‘accurately’ reflect the meanings evidence in the data set as a whole*’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:23). Of course, at this stage what counts as representative was wholly dependent on my theoretical and analytical approach (Braun

& Clarke, 2006). These procedures of reading, re-reading and reviewing whether themes work or whether there are data or themes that were missed during earlier coding stages continued for a considerable time reflecting Braun and Clarke's (2006:23) assertion that this is an '*ongoing organic process.*'

Braun and Clarke (2006:23) suggest this process could go on '*ad infinitum*' and argue that there is no clear point at which to stop. However, they point out that if your refinements are not adding anything substantial then the process is probably at an end. By the end of this phase I had a much clearer impression of my final themes, how they were linked and if they communicated a clear story.

3.11.6 Analysis Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

This phase of defining and refining meant coming to a firm understanding of the essence of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Towards the end of this phase my research themes were clearly defined, and I decided upon final titles that would convey what the theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.11.7 Analysis Phase 6: Producing the Report

This phase involved writing the final analysis from my now fully worked-out themes. This involved telling the complex story of my data in a clear and transparent way that would assist the reader to understand both the quality and validity of my analysis. From the outset of writing my final chapters it was important that the discussion was logical, coherent and an interesting and truly representative story that was well substantiated and that illuminated what mattered most from the research (Mac Naughton et al., 2010).

This process of data analysis and writing up was also not without its challenges. Piecing together the research data was perplexing at times, in terms of disaggregating individual themes. Subsequently, although I had a clear and coherent although complex story I felt when writing what matters most from the research, I needed to adopt a mindset aligned with that of Childers (2012:753) who suggests that it is advantageous of qualitative data researchers to '*keep all the data in play, to keep the experience of data open.*' In terms of this project this idea appealed to me and helped me keep ideas and opportunities of analysis open and fluid.

Therefore, to this end, in the final chapters, I have kept the discussions with the child participants, at times, in their totality and will, potentially, use them several times throughout the chapter to make specific points. These later chapters, therefore, offer an '*analytical narrative that illustrates the story told within my data*' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:753).

Chapter Four:

Findings & Discussions:

What we saw, made and found along the way...

Chapter Four: The Children’s Stories (...and some from adults).

This chapter is a critical discussion of the themes that emerged from the research data. Data, of course, is not ‘*simply containers of meaning*’ (Vaismoradi, 2016:101), rather, it is, and involves, identifying and interpreting multiple meanings through an analytical process that requires persistence and patience. The theoretical framework developed in the Literature Review is utilised throughout this chapter to explain and examine key research findings. The structure of this chapter emerged from the research aims and objectives derived from, and formulated by, the questions from Meek’s (1988) work (See Section 1.6.2). These questions informed aspects of observation and were used to structure the Scrapbooks given to the children participants. This format has, therefore, been further adopted to guide this chapter’s structure to offer clarity and a logical, systematic road map to the findings and subsequent discussion. Thus, the chapter sections (See Figure 15) are as follows:

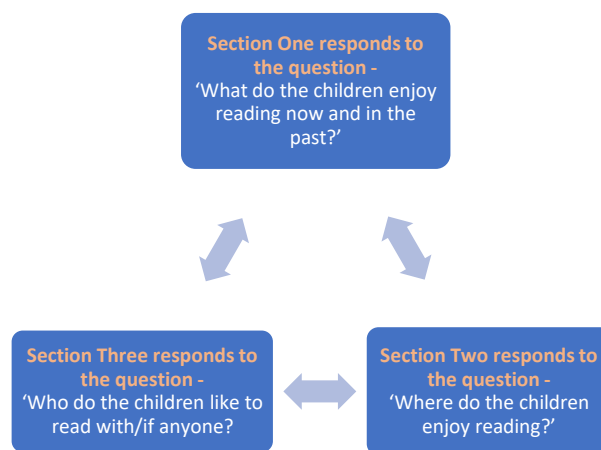


Figure 15. Chapter and Scrapbook Structure

As outlined in the Methodology chapter, the task of this research project was to capture what Geertz (1973:2) identifies as ‘*thick description*’. The two phases were instrumental in capturing moments, snapshots, feelings, and emotional connections. Jerome Bruner (2006:176) argues that it is ‘*rare in educational debates to hear made explicit about everyday experiences,*’ but that was the aim. Accordingly, the detailed fieldnotes, the children participants’ Scrapbooks and subsequent discussions during the child conferencing capture the children’s voices, so aligning with Bruner’s (2006) words. Horton and Kraftl (2006:71) also ask academics and practitioners alike to reflect upon these ideas of ‘*everydayness*’ and focus on the detail that tends to be overlooked and ‘*routinely considered as unremarkable.*’ Everydayness is defined by Horton and Kraftl as all-encompassing and they state that, ‘*the everyday is at first glance everything. It is that which occupies our minds, that which we care about, that which matters, that which is done and that which happens, every day*’ (2006: 71). Here I

address the everyday milieus of childhood that tend to go unrecorded, neglected, and are often underestimated. To help me to consider and understand these everyday routines and practices, Chambers (2011:11) ‘*Reading Circle*’ (See Figure 16 and Section 1.6.1) helps me to illustrate and explain the key findings of this thesis.

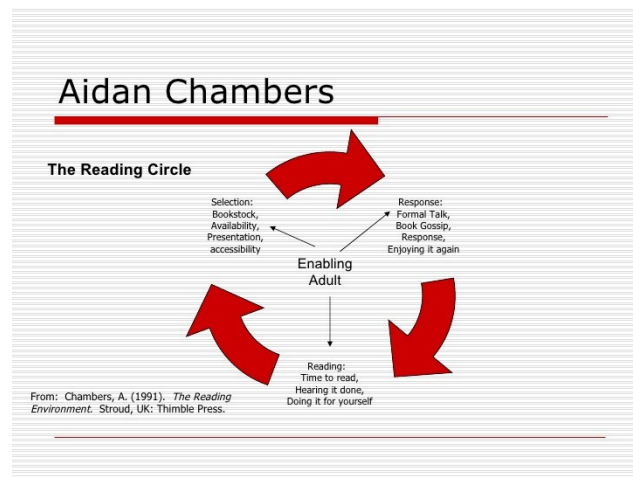


Figure 16. The Reading Circle (Chambers, 1991).

Although Chamber’s (2011) model appears to be a sequence of activities, this is not a linear chain but more a circle/cycle as ‘*the beginning is always its end and the end its beginning*’ (Chambers, 2011:11). Key aspects of the circle include, ‘*selection, reading, time, place, response and enabling adult*’ (See Figure 16) all of which will be referred to throughout this chapter, in terms of the children participants’ everydayness, thus showcasing their voices and surfacing their ‘*everyday reading lives*’ (Cremin et al., 2014:1). Through the combination of traditional methods of observation and semi-structured interviews as well as creative methods such as designing and drawing, writing, child conferencing and storytelling, all of which emphasised listening, a rich picture and detailed set of data emerged which aligned with the communication strengths of the children. Consequently, the following discussion highlights key findings generated using observation and participatory research methods, so contributing to the ‘*pieces of the mosaic*’ (Clark & Moss, 2015:15) and ‘*making sense*’ of this complex area (Denscombe, 2017:174).

Disaggregating individual themes, as already mentioned in Section 3.11, was a challenge, especially in the child conferencing sessions where the children tended to talk about a range of themes simultaneously. It was a complex, task, but it would have been counterproductive to take, as Childers (2012:753) states, ‘*a pair of scissors to my transcripts, literally leaving behind on the cutting room floor those interesting pieces of data that were disrupting arguments or causing undue anxiety.*’ Consequently, I adopted an approach as Childers (2012) suggested, as it appealed to me in terms of

continually revisiting and reconstructing meaning and keeping analytical opportunities open and fluid. To this end, a decision was made to use the children's conversations about the themes in their entirety, where appropriate, enabling me to use them several times to make different points.

The following discussion pays attention to what is happening for the child participants, with peripheral contributions from professional and parental perspectives around their everydayness which are, in many instances, quite different from those of the children. The chapter encompasses and represents the visual and verbal methods of communication employed by the children and so will hopefully further understanding of children's '*ways of seeing*' and understanding reading (Clark, 2010:6). Each aspect of the following discussion will foreground the children's perspectives first followed by a section focussed on the adult participants. These discussions will also include researcher observations and reflections, and descriptions highlighting both practitioner's classroom practices and researcher reading activities and reflections. There was a point during the writing of this chapter where I considered merging and integrating the perspectives of the children and adult participants in terms of each theme, but this was subsequently dismissed because most of the children's experiences of reading proved to be quite immediate, even when discussing past reading. Inevitably, the adults' reflections were much more dominated by their distance from childhood and their memories of reading and becoming a reader were filtered through reminiscence, described by Elisabeth Willingham (2017:140), as the '*warm glow of nostalgia*.' Therefore, the emergent themes have been derived from the children participants data rather than the adult perspectives, with the children's voices being foregrounded, followed by adult perspectives on the same theme.

Finally, as discussed in the Literature Review there are differing responses to ideas expressed in this chapter about reading in terms of governance and curriculum on the part of the adult participants and in my analysis of the data. As noted earlier, in the context of education two distinctive reading agenda are at work simultaneously: the Standards Agenda and a Wider Reading Agenda (Cremin, 2011). These terms can also be seen as mapping the differences between the *spirit* and *letter* of reading, a metaphor adopted by Bethan Marshall and Mary Jane Drummond (2006) when discussing ideas and philosophy of assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning, in that it expresses and captures more readily an emotional dimension to reading that is lacking in the more formal reading agendas. The *letter* of reading is primarily linked to reading as a product with proficiency measured in terms of performance indicators aligned to testing cultures. It is governed and negotiated by adults and often positions the child reader as passive in the process and mostly reflects the skills, techniques, and procedures essential to the Standards Agenda. In contrast, the *spirit* of reading is aligned with reading for pleasure and the love of narrative, as well as a will to read, the individual investment and desire to

read, invoking an emotional space. The *spirit* tends to be mostly associated with promoting and encouraging reader autonomy and agency (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). Themes that emerged from the data will be discussed in terms of these differing agendas and understandings.

4.0 Chapter Structure

The chapter is divided into three sections which encompass five themes which are used as ‘*attribute, descriptor, element, and concept,*’ so organising ideas and enabling me to respond to the research agenda (Vaismoradi, 2016:101). Themes highlighted in the discussion below contain data and codes that have a common point of reference with threads of meaning discovered at the interpretative level (Vaismoradi, 2016).

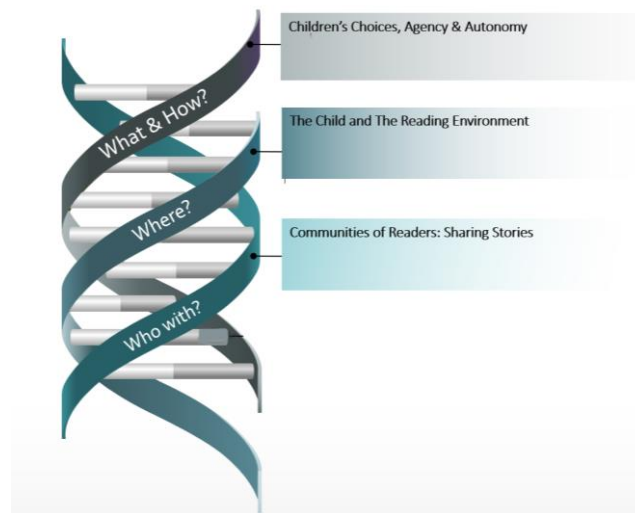


Figure 17. Research Themes

Further, each theme has subthemes that offer a comprehensive view of the data and reveal patterns from observations and the child participants’ accounts (See Figure 18), with the voices of the teaching professionals and parents/guardians/carers contributing to the themes from differing positions.

Research Findings: The Children's Stories (...and some from adults)

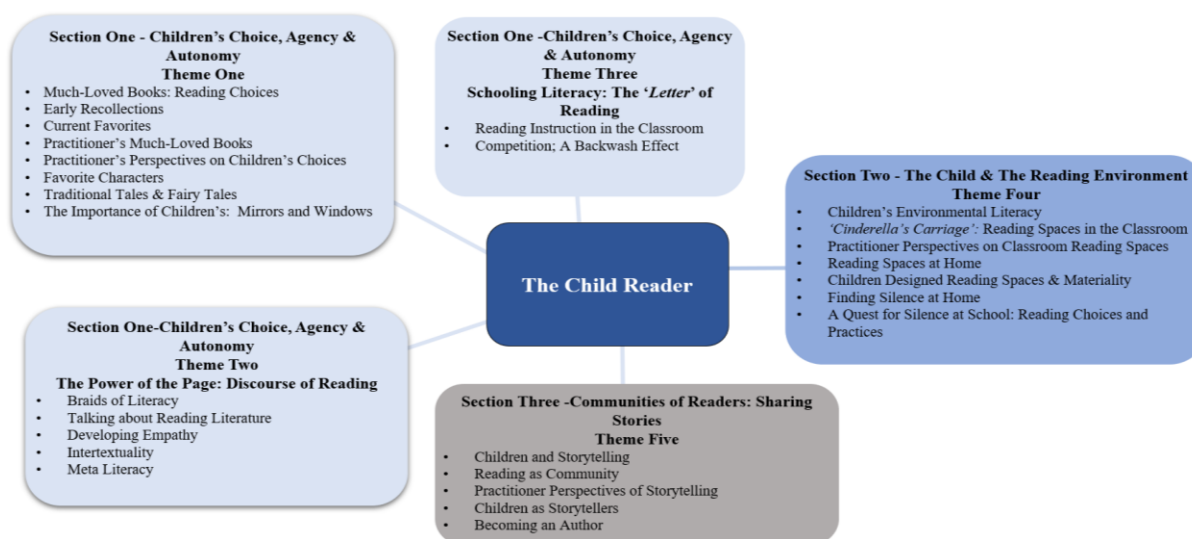


Figure 18. Research Findings: The Children's Stories

4.0.1 Section One

The first Theme, *children's choices, agency & autonomy* was aligned to the research question '**what** do the children enjoy reading now and in the past?' This question surfaces discussions about reading for pleasure and the participants love of texts, explicitly addressing the *spirit* of reading aligned to a '*wider reading agenda*' (Cremin, 2011:3). Theme 2 *the power of the page: discourses of reading*, expands Theme 1 further and includes an analysis of the complex nature of literacy, concepts of meta and visual literacy and unpacks perceptions of reading and what it is to read and be an empowered reader. Theme 3, in contrast, is about '*schooling literacy: the letter of reading*', and explores ideas of the governance of reading, addressing the use of reading schemes and everyday practices and processes of learning to read associated with the *letter* of reading aligned to the '*standards reading agenda*' (Cremin, 2011:3).

4.0.2 Section Two

Theme 4 '*the child & the environment*' explores ideas of '**where** the children enjoy reading'. The discussion focusses predominantly on physical reading spaces and the complex nature of the ways in which physical spaces are designed and utilised in the educational context and home reading environment (HRE) or home literacy environment (HLE). This Theme emphasises the many challenges associated with developing specific reading spaces in schools, surfacing tensions about who creates and owns spaces and how they are used. Additionally, this Theme explores the results of the

children participants designing reading spaces, demonstrating their '*environmental literacy*' (Clark, 2010: 120) and incorporating their understandings of silence and surveillance.

4.0.3 Section Three

The final Theme '*communities of readers: sharing stories,*' refers to the question '**who** the children like to read with (if anyone) and offers a rich picture of the children's engagement with communities of readers. This Theme also highlights ideas of empowerment with children as storytellers and authors/'*scriptors*' (Barthes, 1977:145). In terms of practitioners, recurring themes were ideas of '*reading teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach*' (Cremin, 2014:67) and the role and value of parental involvement in reading.

To conclude this chapter a discussion will be offered that considers all the Themes and Subthemes in terms of the *spirit* and *letter* of reading (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). This will draw together the findings to frame the research in terms of a story told by the children, with supporting contributions from the adults. At this point I feel I should reiterate the complex nature of adult/child status in terms of power in this project. For the children to actively engage and participate in this research project a choice was made at the outset (as discussed in Section 3.5), to avoid engaging with the children from the position of adult authority as much as possible and to attempt to redress the balance of authority. This thread is both implicit, and at times, explicit throughout this chapter.

4.0.4 Baseline Data Research

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, I carried out an inventory of the texts available within the classroom and accessed the Holiday Reading Audit. These inventories acted as baseline research data and were undertaken to offer a richer picture of the books the children had access to in the classroom and the books the children chose to read during their Spring holiday period. For the school classroom book audit, I simply recorded all book titles in both year groups and included both fiction and nonfiction, creating a record highlighting the available texts in the classroom. The collection included fifty-nine books (see list below) that were available in the classroom irrespective of whether the children used them or not.

Classroom Book Collection

Fiction – Picturebooks

'The Bumblebear' 'Eddie's Tent' 'Toad' 'Snail Trail' 'Curious George Discovers the Ocean' 'First Day at Bug School' 'Big Blue Whale' 'Surprising Sharks' 'Ice Bears' 'One Tiny Turtle' 'We're Going on a Picnic' 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' 'Duck in the Truck' 'Super Duck' 'Fix it Duck' 'Kippers Birthday' 'Don't lose Pigley Wibbly Pig' 'Lullabyhullabaloo' 'The Shopping Basket' 'Tiddler' 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' 'Brown Bear, Brown Bear what do you see?' 'Owl Babies' 'After the Storm' 'Dora's Eggs' 'The Very Helpful Hedgehog' 'The Lighthouse Keepers Picnic' 'The Lighthouse Keeper's Tea' 'The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch' 'Handa's Hen' 'Charlie and Lola But excuse me that is my book' 'Topsy and Tim Go Camping' 'Topsy and Time Visit London' 'The Bear's Water Picnic' 'Wolf won't Bite' 'One Snowy Night' 'Ten Little Dinosaurs' 'Commotion in the Ocean' 'The Big Katie Morag Storybook' 'The Second Katie Morag Storybook' 'A Bad Day for Thomas and his Friends' 'The Great Nursery Rhyme Disaster' 'The Huge Book of Worries' 'The Gingerbread Boy' 'Growing Frogs' 'Smile Crocodile Smile' 'The Rainbow Fish' 'Spot and his Grandma' 'Guess how much I love you' 'Worried Arthur'

Traditional Tales

'The Elves and the Shoemaker' 'Snow White and the Enormous Turnip'

Reading Instruction

'Lets start reading – Three Little Pigs'

Non -Fiction Books

'Big Book of Dinosaurs' 'The Global Garden' 'Mad about Minibeasts' 'A Journey through Nature' 'Caterpillar Butterfly' 'Life Cycles: Caterpillar to Butterfly'

During the Spring break, the children in the reception class were asked to note down what they read when they were on holiday (whether at home or elsewhere). Thirteen children completed the audit (48% of the whole cohort). These activities were initiated by the teaching professionals to gain insights into how much reading the children engaged with when out of school. The thirteen children who submitted their personal audits (eight girls and four boys) recorded the number of times they read, the books they chose and the places they read (see below).

Holiday Reading Audit (Summary)

Traditional tales/Fairy tales/ Disney

The Little Mermaid, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Snow Queen, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White.

Contemporary Texts

The Bumble Bee, Little Rabbit Foo Foo, The Little Girl who lost her name, The Gruffalo, Nipper McFee, Francesca the Football Fairy, The Worst Witch, Horrid Henry, Night Monkey, Day Monkey, Princess Palace, I want my dummy

Other

Girl Talk Magazine, Fun at the Canal (reading scheme), Come on Dad (reading scheme)

Where reading took place?

Grandma's caravan, in the garden, On my bed, In the living room, in Alex's room, kitchen table, at home, Grans, Nannas, Nannas (at the library), at home on the sofa in front of everyone, home.

When reviewing the full set of the statistical data related to this audit, it is noticeable that the eight girls involved read significantly more times than the boys. In fact, three of the boys did not record any reading events at all. This could be because the boys forgot to record their reading or that they did not want to engage with the activity. Either way this gender differential does not appear an anomaly as it is played out throughout the research data discussed in this chapter, in that the children who engaged in the research activities the most were predominantly girls.

Having collated the data from the Classroom Book Collection and the School Holiday Audit I compared the texts in terms of the prevalence of contemporary picturebooks, traditional tales and fairy tales, reading schemes, non-fiction, and magazines. The table below reveals the Classroom Book Collection was dominated by contemporary picturebooks, whereas the School Holiday Audit has an equal amount of contemporary picturebooks and traditional tales and fairy tales. These findings will be used as part of the discussion in the main body of this chapter.

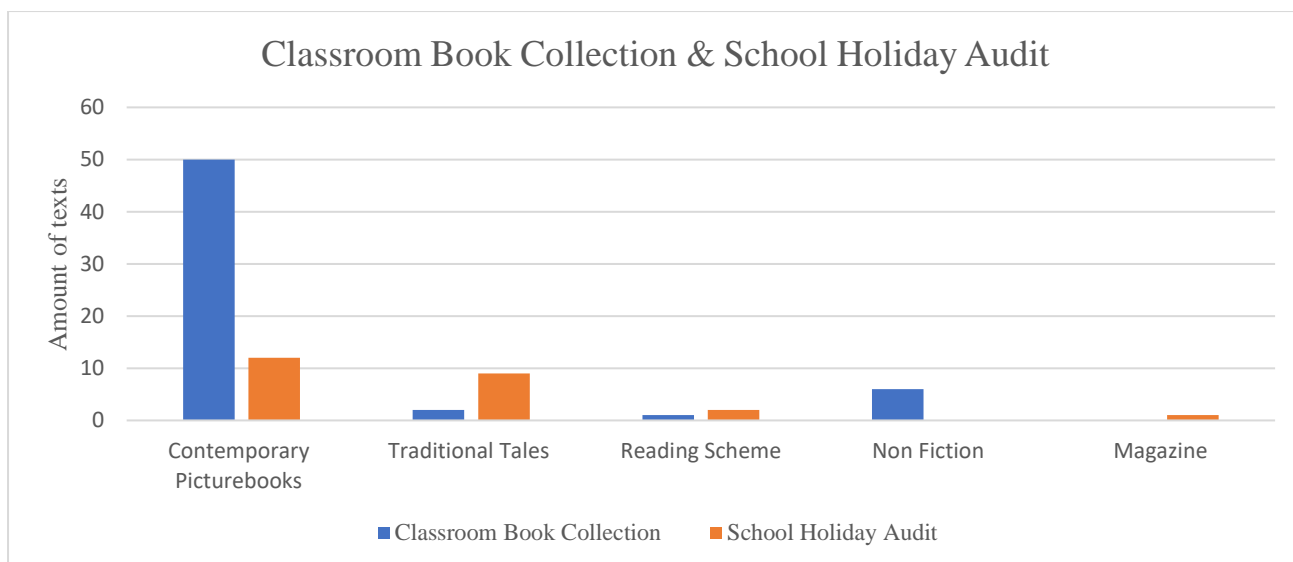


Figure 19. Classroom Book Collection & School Holiday Audit

4.0.5 The Origins of the Classroom Book Collection

To understand more about the origins of the Classroom Book Collection I spoke a second time to the teaching professionals. As noted earlier, the teaching professionals had said that the Classroom Book Collection was largely a mixture of inherited or donated books. However, this additional conversation revealed that there were also a limited number of purchased books. The purchased aspect of the Classroom Book Collection focused heavily on texts aligned with the *'Early Learning Goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage'* (EYFS) and the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. These curricula mandate that children have access to a range of fiction and non-fiction texts in the classroom (EYFS, 2021). Key to developing a suitable collection, according to Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), is to set key criterion for selecting stock so that the books that are chosen, meet the *'pupil's needs, interests and abilities and encourage reading for pleasure'* (CILIP, 2021:n.p.). They state that donations also need to meet the set criteria for the collection too (CILIP, 2021:n.p.). This is a slightly different perspective on access to reading to that of the curricula, in that it implies some form of consultation with children as stakeholders. Funding, inevitably, also played a crucial role in the acquisition of the Classroom Book Collection. Whilst CILIP (2021) recommends that schools provide between ten and thirteen quality library books for every pupil excluding textbooks, structured reading (reading schemes) and class sets, this will amount to a substantial sum of money, one that many schools may not be able to budget for. However, research into book spending and the National Literacy Strategy carried out by Steve Hurd, Malcolm Dixon and

Joanna Oldham (2006:86), highlight the importance of higher book spending and how that translates to higher pupil performance.

These audits formed a baseline data set that proved important as comparators to the children participants responses during the research, with the holiday audit reflecting what they chose to share with the school about their reading beyond the classroom. This data was used further in the following discussions. However, I am aware that it offers only partial accounts of the children's home reading collections. That said, there are also sightings of book collections held in home reading environments from the Scrapbook entries, parent questionnaires, '*literacy events*' (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8) and child conferencing discussions.

Section One: Theme 1

*'All reading involves interpretation: working out what the text means. What it **seems** to mean (superficially) and what it **actually** means. Ambiguity is at play in every text of every kind. Knowing how to interpret is an essential feature of reading. Let's call it, reading with thoughtful, discriminating, and critical understanding'*

(Aidan Chambers, 2020:xii)

4.1 Children's Choices, Agency & Autonomy

Early childhood memories of books often include favourite and much-loved stories that *'speak directly to us.... a story that touches an emotional chord, somehow reflecting a keenly felt need, concern or set of values'* (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004:205). This section elicits responses about these stories by asking the question *what do the children enjoy reading now and in the past?* Early conversations and observations were followed up in the questions in the Scrapbooks which were used as object elicitation, as mentioned in Section 3.7.5, to engage the children in discussions about their reading preferences and choices. To return to Cremin's key concepts, the *'wider reading agenda'* and *'standards agenda'* (2011:3) both emerged at different points during data collection and are highlighted using illustrative examples. The first part of section one highlights the books the children chose to share with the researcher that encompass ideas of reading for pleasure and the *spirit* of reading with an additional focus on multiple literacies.

In defining reading for pleasure, Cremin et al., (2014:5) characterise it as complex, stating that it is, *'a personal solitary experience, conducted in privacy, yet even when readers read alone, the act of reading remains profoundly social.'* This definition anticipates and celebrates the reader's volition, their autonomy (Marshall & Drummond, 2006) and agency, as well as their desire to read and the satisfaction gained from engaging with texts and the characters stories as well as the interaction with others (Cremin et al., 2014). These ideas resonate with that of fostering children's ability to make sense of their worlds and to develop creativity, curiosity to learn and imagination to expand and develop their capacity and capability, resulting in new ways of seeing and engaging with texts. The contradictory characteristics defining reading for pleasure as escapism, as a social act and as being about engaging in profound ways with stories and characters, fits with what was discovered in this chapter.

Mentioned in the Methodology chapter, object elicitation, in the form of the covers of picturebooks featured in the Book Trust list of top books for children under five years old, images that represented

story themes (See Section 4.1.1 below) and the Scrapbooks were used to initiate conversations with the children. These visual anchors served to support the children's recognition and discussion of a range of texts (Hazel, 1995), spaces and experiences.

Researcher Observations & Reflections

As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter (3.10.2) the use of object elicitation needed to be questioned with regards intention and the impact on the integrity of the data collected when the children participants were presented with picture book covers that may or may not have represented the books they were interested in and story themes that may have distorted their ideas of what types of stories they enjoy. However, using these visual representations in the first instance was deemed essential in supporting the children when considering the choices they make in terms of the books and types of stories they chose to include. An unintentional consequence of using object elicitation is that the Scrapbooks themselves became a form of object elicitation and rather than simply acting as a catalyst they became focal points and works of art in their own right.

Researcher Observations & Reflections

What was interesting about this part of the research was on the one hand the sheer joy of the children seeing the cover pages of their favourite books, followed by their retelling of their favourite current stories or much-loved books when they were younger. The children sorted through them and although they did focus on the covers, they also recalled other texts that related to the book covers I had shown them, for instance focusing on a favourite author rather than book title. Importantly, none of the picturebook covers used in this activity, when developing their Scrapbooks, were traditional tales or fairy tales. They were all contemporary picture books selected from the '*Book Trust*' top 100 picture books.

This practice of recounting stories and writing responses was prevalent throughout the development of the first part of their Scrapbooks, provoking group discussions about each book they introduced. The book covers served as catalysts to provoke reading memories, with the support of their peers they built story recollection as a community of readers. It also evoked discussions about who was with them when reading the story and where they were. Many of the children chose to stick the pictures of the covers in their Scrapbooks under the headers of nursery, school etc, although they also drew and wrote references to other books alongside them. The other response noted in this observation was that of disappointment when their favourite book cover was not available in the collection of book covers.

4.1.1 Much Loved Books: Reading Choices

In terms of choices, the observations watching reading activity in the setting, discussions about reading and the participatory activities held with the children surfaced their interest in many different kinds of stories. For example, one of the later literacy events was stimulated by images selected from a range of art (See a few examples of them in Figure 20), which were designed as a form of image elicitation.

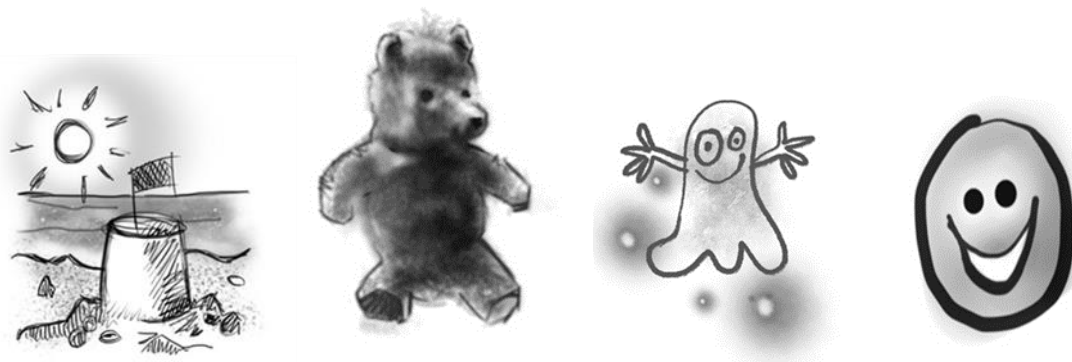


Figure 20. Sample of Images Representing Story Themes

When asked what kinds of stories the children enjoyed, Child 1 (age 5) wrote, *'I like reedin abawt animals and I like reedin bout frends.'* Child 5 responded *'I like scary stories and funny stories and stories about animals like, Can't you sleep little bear'*. Child 2 liked *'stories at the beach and funny stories.'* Child 4 enjoyed stories about *'friends, magic storys. beach storys and funny storys.'*, whilst Child 8 and Child 13 preferred; *'funny stories, ones with friends and animals.'* The latter also added that *'my favourite stories are monster and slime stories.'* Although image elicitation was used to stimulate conversations and other responses about their choices in terms of themes, they moved beyond this set of ideas to incorporate their own preferences about the types of stories they enjoy. Thus, they used the materials not as an end in themselves, but as tools for thinking.

There did, however, appear to be a consensus amongst the children across the data that they loved reading stories about animals, funny stories, stories set at the beach, scary stories, magic stories, and stories based around friendships and making friends. Two of these categories, stories about animals and their friendships and endeavours tended to dominate the Scrapbooks. In addition, when the children, teaching professionals and parents/guardians reflected upon books they remembered from when they were younger many of the chosen texts also featured animal characters. Children, according to Nicole Larsen, Kang Lee and Patricia Ganea (2017) are naturally drawn to books about animals, and they argue that many children's books use anthropomorphised animal characters to make the stories more captivating. This is done in several different ways. Broadly speaking, animal characters tend to fit within two categories: animals that talk however act naturally and animals that dress and act

like human beings (Arbuthnot, 1964). That said, both categories display anthropomorphism (Larsen et al., 2017), that being the ascribing of human characteristics, traits, emotions, and intentions to animals (Pinsent, 1993; Markowsky, 1975). It is also suggested that it is not unusual for young children who live in worlds full of animals, both imaginary and real, to gravitate towards stories about animals (Melson, 2005; Burke & Copenhaver, 2004). This preference amongst the children participants also had an impact upon the publishing mini-project, where the central character became a teddy bear. In terms of the context from which these narratives emerge, Jay Blanchard (1982:586) contends that the portrayal of *'animals, monsters and machines as characters possessing various degrees of humanity,'* originates from traditional children's literature including folktales, fables, and myths, something which resonates with the findings of this research. Such narratives are the ones most prevalent in the next part of this discussion.

4.1.2 Early Recollections

The following texts were recorded in the Scrapbooks as the children's favourite and much-loved books when at nursery and so potentially represent the children's earliest memories of reading for pleasure, something that Rudine Sims Bishop (1990:1) refers to as their *'windows'*, as I discuss later. Many of the books on the list focus on animal characters. They appeared in the Scrapbooks numerous times.

'We're all going on a Bear Hunt,' 'Gruffalo's Child,' 'Cinderella' 'No Bed without Ted,' 'The Gingerbread Man,' 'Commotion in the Ocean,' 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' 'Rosie's Walk,' 'Elmer,' 'Room on the Broom,' 'Alfie,' 'Gruffalo,' 'Where the Wild things are,' 'Ba Baa Black Sheep,' 'The Tiger who came to tea,' 'The Big Bad Wolf,' 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar,' 'Dear Zoo,' 'Elmer's Band,' 'Little Red Riding Hood,' 'Alfie' and 'Dogger.'

When the child participants recalled reading when they were younger, they often talked about the support they received from parents, carers, or siblings, who Chambers describes as *'enabling adults'* and *'trusted readers'* (2011:17). Whilst conversations partly focused on the when, where, what and who of reading, they also touched on how they felt about these early books. For instance, Child 2 recalled, *'wen I was a babby I red sinddarella and it was reely good.'* This entry was narrated by Child 9 and written in her Scrapbook by her mother and covered two books. The first book mentioned was characterised by an image and that it was an example of paper engineering. Indeed, it seemed to be memorable because of this novelty, *'I read a book with flaps; one had an umbrella.'* Child 9 also talked about a book she had loved when she was a baby, which was called *That's not my Lamb*. This account also went on to retell aspects of the narrative. *'That's not my lamb, I has loads of lambs on*

different pages, they say that's not my lamb, then that is my lamb!' Remembering, retelling and adapting were important reading practices to the children, something I return to later.

4.1.3 Current Favourites

The initial discussions and the texts listed and recorded in their Scrapbooks later (see below) identified the children's current favourite books they liked to read for pleasure, and some did engage with a few of them in the setting, especially in one of the two reading spaces discussed later, as they were part of the classroom collection. Some of the titles were also on the past reading favourites list, showing a long-term commitment to, and familiarity with, these texts.

'Gruffalo,' 'Where the Wild things Are,' 'Room on the Broom,' 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar,' 'Matilda,' 'Disney Books,' 'Dear Zoo,' 'Blue Bus,' 'Teacher Tina,' 'Builder Bill,' 'Max the Brave,' 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt,' 'Can't you sleep little Bear,' 'Princess Book.'

During the child conferencing activities, the children were asked to share their Scrapbook entries and discuss the pictures that they had drawn in response to the question *'can you draw a picture of your favourite book?'* Their Scrapbook entries contained illustrations of pages from the books, their covers and sometimes key characters. Some images were accompanied by text. The ones that appeared the most frequently included *We're going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury (1989), *Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell (1982), *Elmer* by David McKee (1989) and *The Tiger who came to Tea* by Judith Kerr (1968). There were also images that focused on traditional or fairy tales, which was a genre they were looking at in class. The books listed in both the *'early recollections'* and *'current favourites'* as well as the conversations about types of books the children love to read could be characterised as the children's collective Home Book Collection.

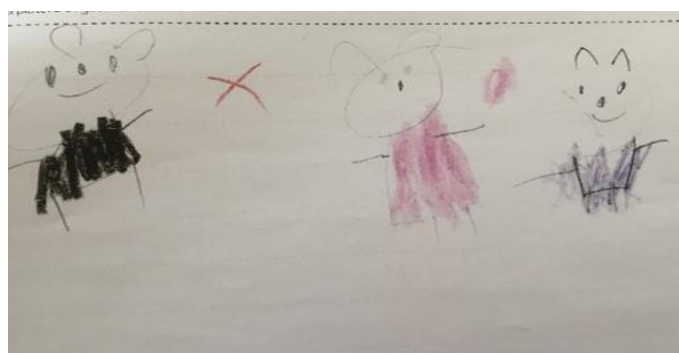


Figure 21. Child 2 (age 5) The Three Bears



Figure 22. Child 1 (age 5) We're Going on a Bear Hunt



Figure 23. Child 5 (age 5) Goldylox and the Three Bears



Figure 24. Child 3 (age 5) Using Picturebook covers to illustrate favourite books: Dear Zoo, Elmer, The Tiger who came to Tea



Figure 25. Child 4 (age 5). Using Picturebook covers to illustrate favourite books: Dear Zoo, The Tiger who came to Tea

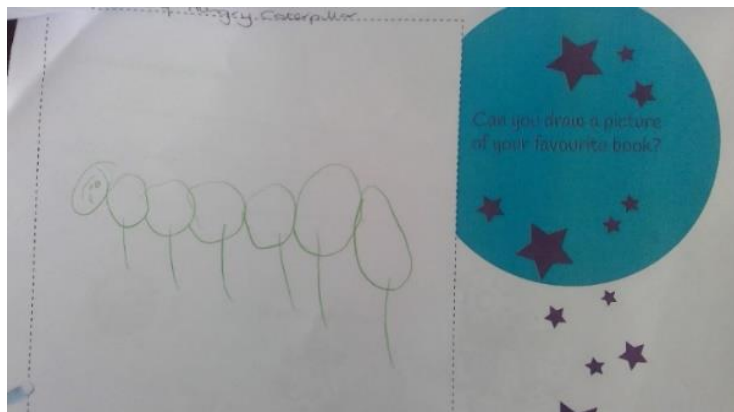


Figure 26. Child 14 (age 5) The Very Hungry Caterpillar



Figure 27. Child 12 (age 5) Dear Zoo

The next brief section gives an indication of the kind of conversations that took place around the images the children were creating. Regarding the Scrapbook entry above, Figure 21, created by Child 2, I asked who the focus of the picture was, and Child 2 responded, after some consideration, 'Emm

Daddy Bear’ before expanding into talking about the others. When I asked Child 1, ‘*can you tell me why We’re Going on a Bear Hunt is your favourite?*’ they said that the climax of the book, and the aftermath was their favourite part, ‘*I like something about where they met the bear and they run away* (Child 1 age 5)’. Thus, they demonstrated their understanding of the overall story, as was also the case when I asked Child 3 to tell me about their picture. They responded, ‘*It’s Elmer, it’s about, like, a colourful elephant*’ and when I asked, ‘*what happens to Elmer?*’ they said that ‘*So Elmer emmm feels different from the other elephants.*’ Similarly, when I asked Child 5 about their picture they said, ‘*Well that’s Goldilocks and the Three Bears, I like that one and I like as well Can’t you sleep little Bear, it’s about the little bear who can’t sleep and the big bear has to get loads of lanterns.*’ Again, the latter part of the response emphasises their understanding of the overall narrative. In this case, although from two very different types of tradition, anthropomorphised bears were central to both, and the child made the link across the two stories.

4.1.4 Practitioner’s Much-Loved Books

I also talked to the teaching professionals and gave the parents questionnaires to complete that asked the same question I had asked of the children. Teacher 1 explained that they had loved reading when they were a child and like the younger participants, flagged up several titles which focused on anthropomorphic characters;

‘Yes, I used to love reading. ‘Guess how much I love you’ that story, that was my favourite story I loved that one and I used to love ‘do you know’? Honey Bear the Disney one ‘cos I used to have the teddy since I was a baby that was Honey Bear so I used to love that story that went along with the bear.

Teacher 2 also responded to this question, labelling some of the books differently and asserting their cultural significance, before focusing on a narrative that did not have the same cultural cache but had clearly been very important to them. The first comment asserts their knowledge of books, whilst the latter shows their genuine attachment to a text.

Emm and I think of world classics like Bear Hunt, The Tiger Who Came To Tea, Hairy Maclary was an absolute favorite I’ve still got that book from when I was little. Emm there was also this fish one but I can’t remember what it was called. It’s a goldfish and the boy feeds him and feeds him too much so he grows and grows and grows. And then there’s this one picture in the book and he ends up putting the fish in the bath and then he outgrows the bath and then he comes down the stairs in loads of water and they have to take him to a pool. I can’t remember what it was called but it was my favourite book.

Both of these accounts contrasted with that of Teacher 3, who replied,

I can't really remember reading books as a small child, but it was probably in bed before going to sleep but I do remember when I was a little older we read every night. It just became part of my daily routine.

Here Teachers 1 and 2 reflect upon their childhood reading and attempt to recall fragmented memories of much-loved reading favourites. These memories and emotions induced when attempting to recall much-loved childhood books could be seen as evoking a nostalgia that connects to distinctive aspects of childhood, something often associated with a quest for an experience lost in adulthood (Wesseling, 2018:27). These reflections from Teachers 1 and 2 resonate with the texts the children participants chose to share. In the case of Teacher 3, the association of place and routine come first, rather than specific texts. In terms of the texts, the parent/carer/guardians who completed a questionnaire asking the same questions typically recalled very similar lists of titles, so Parent 3 recalled, '*We're Going on a Bear Hunt, The Very Hungry Caterpillar and The Tiger who came to Tea.*' This may indicate slippage between texts of their pasts and that of their children, that being an issue of memory, or may be a more direct reference to experience, whereby they later shared the books they had enjoyed the most with their own children. However, Parents 1, 2, and 3 also mentioned books for older readers, including ones by Judy Blume and Enid Blyton. In contrast, Parent 2 could only recall reading schemes including '*Janet and John and Ladybird books.*' This diverse set of responses show how childhood is crosscut by age but may also reflect issues of access within and outside the home.

4.1.5 Practitioners' Perspectives of Children's Choices

Both practitioners situated within the classroom shared very different understandings of the children's preferences in terms of reading for pleasure. When the teaching professionals were asked which books, or stories, they thought the children loved, Teacher 1 responded;

The Gruffalo they absolutely love, they love, We're going on a Bear Hunt that was one they really loved. They are really loving the Jolly Postman at the minute. I knew they would like it but they're really enjoying it, and also the individual stories, so like Jack and the Beanstalk and Cinderella they're really picking up on the characters and things like that.

Teacher 1 appeared to be familiar with, understand, and had insights into what the children in reception class preferred to read. These references were reflected in the children participants' Scrapbook entries. This, level of understanding, according to Cremin (2014:5) is essential as it means that professionals

are in a position to pay attention to *'children's attitudes, their preferences, pleasures and practices and their perception of themselves as readers in order to help ensure that they develop as readers who not only can, but do choose to read, for pleasure and for life'* (Cremin, 2014:5). Here Cremin makes explicit key professional attributes and skills necessary to support and engage children, including the need for a deeper understanding of the complex nature of picturebooks, a richer awareness of the world of literature and an in-depth knowledge of children's reading practices and preferences. All of these points, made explicit in their comments, reflect both the *spirit* and *letter* of reading (Marshall & Drummond, 2006).

In contrast, however, when Teacher 2 was asked the same question, their response was very different.

Emm this cohort. It's hard, generally they like the traditional tales but then we're looking at those with topic. Emm I think some of the boys love dinosaurs, there's a couple of dinosaur books there that they get out and have a look at. They quite often, more often than I thought they might, go to the books and look at the pictures and even some of the boys as well which I'm quite surprised at.

The response *'it's hard'* suggested that there was comparatively little understanding regarding what the children prefer to read, which could simply be an acknowledgement that this teacher was not necessarily as familiar with the group. Teacher 2 also expressed surprise that the children chose to read the books located in the nursery corner, which suggests their construction of childhood positions them as non-reading. They additionally alluded to gender with regard to choosing to read rather than engage with other classroom led activities. This illuminated different expectations of reading depending on the children's gender, highlighting the dominant discourse and constructions of the child reader as *'reluctant, disengaged and, at times, adversarial readers'* (Scholes et al., 2020:163).

4.1.6 Favourite Characters

Although many of the books the children chose to share were contemporary picturebooks there were many references made (See Sections 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) to traditional tales and fairy tales. These references were yet more prevalent when the children were asked to draw their favourite book characters, as the illustrative examples below from the Scrapbooks indicate. What is noticeable here is the disparity between the books the children participants love to read and the characters they chose to illustrate in their Scrapbooks. Their favourite characters were not necessarily from their favourite books, and some may have been accessed via other media, suggesting multiple literacies and intertextuality.

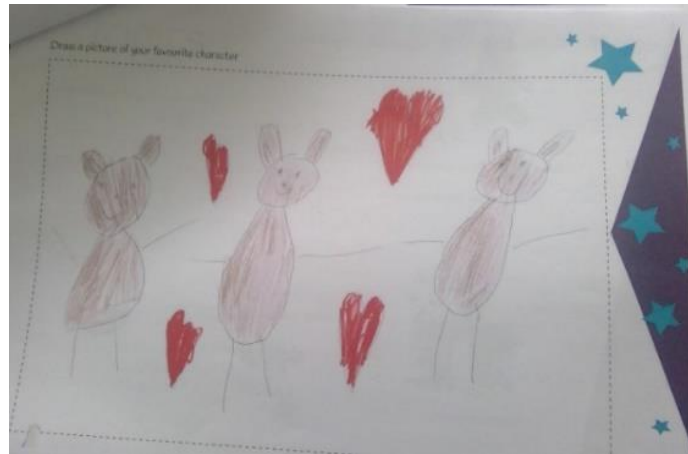


Figure 28. Child 5 (age 5) The Three Bears



Figure 29. Child 6 (age 5) Goldilocks



Figure 30. Child 7 (age 5) Goldilocks

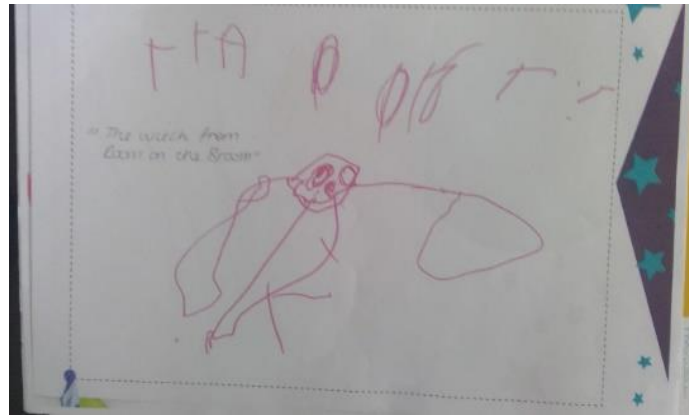


Figure 31. Child 8 (age 5) The Witch from Room on the Broom

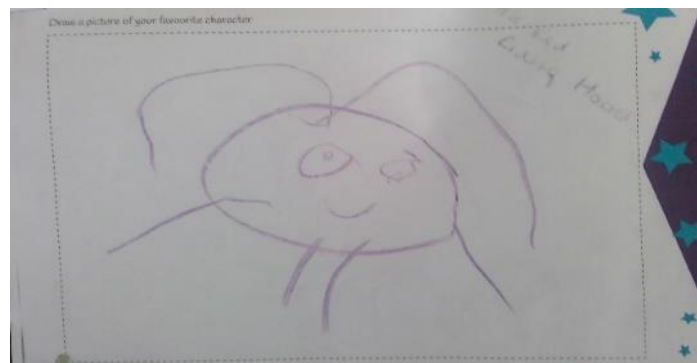


Figure 32. Child 9 (age 4) Little Red Riding Hood

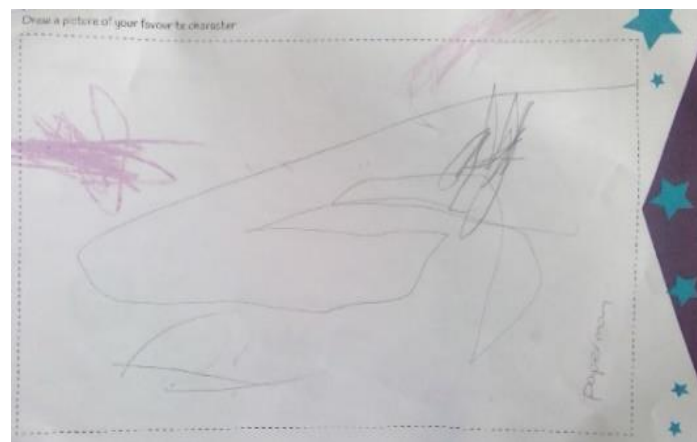


Figure 33. Child 10 (age 4) Paperman

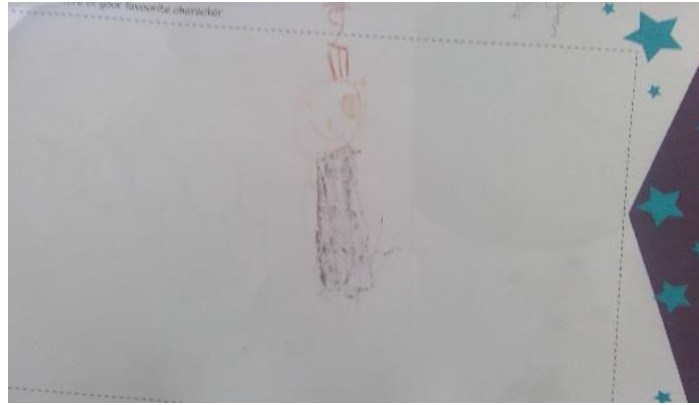


Figure 34. Child 12 (age 5) Goldilocks



Figure 35. Child 14 (age 5) Elsa from Frozen

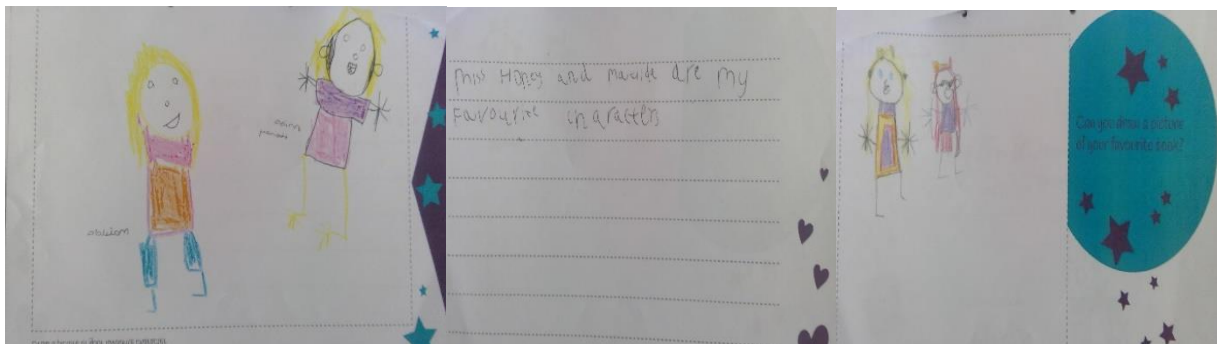


Figure 36. Child 13 (age 5) Matilda & Miss Honey

For example, Child 2 drew her favourite character, Snow White. When I asked why she liked Snow White, she responded ‘*Well it’s cos it really a traditional story or something. And I like traditional stories.*’ When I responded by asking ‘*when you say traditional, what does that mean to you?*’ Child 2 replied ‘*Well it’s just means nice stuff to me.*’ This idea of the traditional story may have partly come from work that was being done on this in the classroom, but the term also resonated with Child 2 as an

affirmation of their reading choices. Her intertextual understanding of the character was evident from what she said as she recalled the story and wrote in her Scrapbook: – *my character is snow white and shes so kind to anyone. evin she picks buaetiful flowers and I like snow white and the prince evin. I watch snow white on TV evin. I like watching snow white and the prince*). The use of the word ‘even’ here suggests a tolerance of the prince, but also, whilst preferring to read about the character, that they would engage with them in other media.



Figure 37. Child 2 (age 5) Snow White

Whilst animals dominated the favourite narratives and books, as mentioned earlier, the favourite characters included in the Scrapbook entries were more often human characters based on traditional stories and fairy stories, as well as Disney characters. Given how many of the older Disney films themselves refer to fairy and traditional tales, there could be assumed to be considerable media cross over here. Of course, there could be many explanations for this difference between favourite narratives and characters. Some of the research on this, however, contradicts the arguments about the appeal of anthropomorphism mentioned earlier. For instance, Larsen et al. (2017), explored, through their research, whether picturebooks with anthropomorphised animal characters promoted prosocial behaviours in young children. The research findings suggested that children tend to relate more to human characters than anthropomorphised animal characters and argued that for many children, animal characters are not that relatable, resulting in them not acting upon the moral of the story (Larsen et al., 2017). However, whilst this flags up some interesting points it starts from the idea of children acting upon morals that are didactically and explicitly being encouraged and endorsed through story. This tends to frame or construct the child reader as rather passive or as a ‘*blank slate*’ (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011:39). This construction of childhood militates against the findings of this research project as the children engaged with narratives on many different levels rather than ideas of transmission (See Theme 2). The difference between the two was not explicitly my interest in the research, but I feel it could be usefully explored in other work.

4.1.7 Traditional Tales and Fairy Tales

Traditional tales and fairy tales have been seen as a feature of childhood for a considerable time (Grenby, 2014). The content and form of these tales have developed over time from ‘*simple, imaginative oral tales*’ containing elements of magic and the incredible, related to the ‘*belief systems, values, rites, and experiences of pagan peoples*’ (Zipe, 2011:221). These narratives came to be combined, in early books written specifically for children, with moral instruction. The resultant books were often didactic and specifically designed to be ‘*spiritually improving*’ (Broomhall et al., 2017). This does resonate with aspects of the narratives in many of the fairy tales and traditional tales the children participants referred to. However, in their insistence that these were favourite characters, aspects of this didacticism or training were removed, as when Child 2 said about feeling they could ‘*even*’ deal with Snow White and the Prince, when in theory acquiescence to heteronormativity is a major part of the narrative.

This means that these texts can be seen in several ways. On the one hand, as described in the Literature Review, these fairy tales can be seen, in some senses as ‘*readerly texts*’ (Barthes, 1974) which tend to frame and position the implied child reader as a passive in the process and a consumer of the author’s voice. The author’s voice, therefore, according to Barthes (1974) conveys and addresses through traditional tales and fairy tales cultural codes, beliefs, values, and conventions (Zipe, 2011). Broadly speaking, generations share their culture and beliefs with their children as part of their learning journey (Brown et al., 2016). Traditional tales and fairy tales are often seen to be socially specific and passed from generation to generation within institutional and family discourse, with Marek Tesar, David Kupferman and Sophia Rodriguez (2016) suggesting that fairy tales and traditional tales play a substantial role in shaping childhoods.

This legacy of moral and instructional texts lingers in our education system and has become part of the fabric of the schooling curriculum. Indeed, in my period with the setting I observed various sessions focusing on this kind of tale as that was a current curriculum focus, although what was taught did not necessarily coincide with children’s reports of favourite characters or books. This is not to say that these didactic lessons reside only in traditional tales and fairy tales. Contemporary picturebooks often contain moral tales of right and wrong, but these texts are often written in a less didactic way, so offering the reader space to interpret and make their own meaning. Picturebooks, in addition, tend to be more innovative and provocative texts that do not always meet traditional expectations and conventions and problematise the reality being described. As discussed in Section 2.3.5 Barthes (1974) disputes the ideas of ‘*the author*’ rather he advocates for a ‘*scriptor*’ who ‘*combines pre-existing texts*

in new ways’ resulting in what Raj, (2015:77) describes as ‘*a heterogeneous combination of texts*’ with traditional tales and fairy tales embedded within them. Barthes (1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631) further proposes and reiterates that all writing draws on previous texts ‘*norms and conventions*’ and therefore it can be argued that as a result, these texts create countervalue to passive and mechanistic readings.

However, another approach to this is to begin from Brittney van Tonder, Alison Arrow and Tom Nicholson’s position (2019:88) that children who have access to ‘*literacy-related*’ opportunities and activities at home should ‘*benefit and develop high levels of literate cultural capital.*’ This conscious socialising process is about developing children’s cultural assets, which according to Brice Heath (1982:49), means what children, as they grow up, learn ‘*about ‘ways of taking,’ meaning from the environment around them.*’ Therefore, storytelling in this sense, according to Justine Cassell and Kimiko Ryokai (2001:170), is a vehicle to socialise children, often unwittingly, to teach what stories are important and appropriate and to develop their competency as ‘*tellers of their family’s life stories.*’ This does not suggest that ‘*children are merely passive recipients of culture*’ (Flynn, 2016:256), but that they are active participants, and as Robin Bernstein (2011:28) suggests ‘*children are experts in the scripts of children culture.... virtuoso performers of childhood.*’ All the same, the idea that children are active participants in shaping culture does not, according to Richard Flynn (2016:258), ‘*underestimate the power that adults and institutional discourses have in shaping children’s culture.*’

This attachment to human characters from fairy and traditional tales as favourites was further reinforced during the child conferencing using the Scrapbooks, where the children talked extensively about Snow White, Goldilocks, Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood. Interestingly, these discussions about traditional tales and fairy tales surfaced a shared understanding of these dominant cultural artefacts and the children’s understanding of these familiar narratives/cultural capital, became, in turn, shared practice. When talking about traditional stories they all knew the key points about each narrative and talked with ease about the textual features of the narrative arc, protagonists, and the structure of the text.

Throughout the conversations about their favourite characters the children participants tended to omit a lot of description leaving ‘*narrative gaps*’ (Meek, 1988:16) suggesting that as a community/audience (including myself), we were assumed to share and appreciate the meanings and references made to a specific book character. This discussion demonstrated an understanding of shared culture, and is shown, for instance, in the appreciation Child 2 had that her audience would know that ‘*Daddy Bear*’ was one of the three bears in *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* without having to explain. From the

Scrapbook entries, these genres played a crucial role in storytelling during the research, in line with the suggestion by Tesar et al., (2016) that they are shared through generations in families and have become part of the cultural fabric of childhood and family.

Whilst some home literacy may mirror or even match the school context in terms of exposure to specific genres, themes, or print (Haney & Hill, 2004 cited in Van Tonder, 2019), what needs to be noted here are forms of home '*literacy practices valued by their cultural community*' (Hammett Price et al., 2009:171) that are more closely aligned to the children's families and or community settings and may not necessarily have links to '*school-type*' literacies. However, in text rich households, the literacy practices and subsequent literacy knowledge that children develop at home are then brought to school, showing how cultural capital has an impact in the educational experience.

The research data supports the assertion and corroborates the idea that traditional tales and fairy tales are present in all the children's repertoire of reading whether through school or home literacy practices, although the teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians did not make specific reference, during the research interviews, to traditional tales and fairy tales. However, traditional tales and fairy tales did appear in the physical, textual and curriculum space, something which may have impacted on the children participants choices. Indeed, *Cinderella's Carriage* was mentioned many times in terms of physical reading spaces. This reading space was designed by the teaching professionals for the nursery and primary reception classes, and I observed much use of it, although with some limits, as discussed later. In addition, the classroom displays exhibiting the children's work during the research were dominated by traditional tales and fairy tales. These wall displays were developed by teachers and are used as '*texts*' that '*tell the story of what children know, what they are learning and where they might go next*' (Roskos & Neuman, 2011:112). This reflects the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum frameworks being followed at the time. Whilst this potentially does account for the prevalence of this kind of narrative in the Scrapbooks, it does not account for the disparity mentioned above between key choices of character and books

As a final point, for many of the children fairy tale narrative structures were quite appealing, with the children being familiar with elements like '*once upon a time.*' This means that not only were narratives understood, and character, but also the conventions of the genre. Their knowledge of story, conventions and characters, whether in fairy tale or picturebook, is evident throughout this chapter and was employed in a practical way when they developed their own picturebook (See Section 4.5.5), which also drew on their enthusiasm for narratives featuring anthropomorphic characters.

4.1.8 Summary: The Importance of the Children's 'Mirrors and Windows'

When the children discussed their reading choices a mixture of contemporary picturebooks, traditional stories and fairy tales were mentioned. In terms of preferred characters, fairy tales dominated. It would be a reasonable assumption that both home and school environments have influenced the children's choices. Having reviewed the Holiday Reading Audits, collated over a two-week holiday period before the curriculum focus shifted to fairy and traditional tales, such tales were also shown to be an important feature there. Both environments, then, featured some similar texts. In home environments, traditional stories and fairy tales are shared, along with Disney versions, whilst in school the Curriculum dictates that this genre is incorporated. This indicates that the arbitrary nature of dichotomising or disaggregating ideas between home and school as the origins of children's knowledge and love of traditional tales and fairy tales is unhelpful. Offering a range of perspectives, as discussed above, is much more useful in terms of attempting to understand the complex nature of children's acquisition of cultural capital.

However, books from one aspect of the school reading environment were largely missing from the Scrapbooks and the child conferencing discussions. The Classroom Book Collection (which contributed to baseline data, see Section 4.0.4) contained fifty-nine texts, most of which were contemporary picturebooks, but the only ones that featured in the Scrapbooks and subsequent discussions were *We're going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen & Oxenbury, 1989), *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson & Schleffer, 1999), and *Commotion in the Ocean* (Andreae & Wojtowycz, 1998). These books equated to only five per cent of the Classroom Book Collection. The reading materials available in this collection largely did not reflect the children's choices. Indeed, the Scrapbook entries and subsequent child conferencing discussions mostly reflected the children's Home Reading Collections.

There is substantial evidence, throughout the data, particularly when the children are talking about where they like to read, that reading in the school environment is significant. However, the only time books in this collection were specifically mentioned is when Teacher 2 referred to the dinosaur books some of the boys read (See Section 4.1.5). It could be argued that the reading materials in any such collections should be familiar and of personal interest to the children who occupy that space (Worthy et al., 1999). This would be perceived as a '*promising avenue*' to improve children's attitudes towards reading according to Jo Worthy, Megan Moorman and Margo Turner (1999:12), and is '*closely aligned to performance in reading literacy*' (OECD, 2002:3). This links to the previous points made about developing children's cultural assets, referred to as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) within the school

context and the idea of the ways in which children learn to take meaning from the environment around them (Brice Heath, 1982:49).

In part the Classroom Book Collection may have been underused because the curriculum left little time for wider reading, or free reading time was not allocated very often. It may also be that it was not signalled by teachers as a valuable source of reading material (through choosing books from it themselves to share with the children). However, such collections offer a potentially valuable resource as a ‘mini-library’ if the materials are carefully selected, preferably with input from all stakeholders including children, and access to make personal choices is part of the school day. At this point I would like to draw on the work of Bishop (1990), as published in *Perspectives: Choosing and using books for the classroom*, which focused on the need for book collections to represent the multicultural nature of the world. Although not the focus of this thesis, she creates a useful metaphor that attempts to explain the value of children having access to a range of books. She suggests that:

books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation and readers often seek their mirrors in books (Bishop, 1990:1).

Bishop’s comments suggest that there is a need to have a diverse range set of texts available in such collections that can act as both ‘*mirrors and windows*’ representing the children in the classroom and the worlds beyond them (Bishop, 1990:1; Skinner, 2016). Encountering texts that are relevant, interesting, exciting, stimulating and personally engaging is crucial, according to Cremin (2014), to ensure texts motivate the individual to ‘*read of their own free will*’ (Cremin, 2014:12; Wallace, 2021). Fisher and Frey (2018) flag up that teachers need to increase reading choice to increase reading volume and suggest that children who have opportunities to choose their own books ‘*develop elaborate strategies for selecting books and are more likely to become intrinsically motivated readers*’ (2018:19). Further, research with primary aged children by Alice Reedy and Roussel De Carvalho (2021:140) emphasised ‘*children’s agency and choice*’ and ‘*the reading environment.*’ The research findings suggest that schools need to ensure that non-curriculum reading materials exist, and time to read them, ‘*otherwise it might serve to the detriment of reading for pleasure*’ (Reedy & De Carvalho,

2021:140). In terms of choice the children specified that teaching staff ask them what they like to read, something aligned to the objectives of this research agenda, and that being able to choose for themselves ‘*would increase the likeliness of them wanting to read for pleasure*’ (Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021:140).

The Reading Framework produced by the DfE in January 2022 says that book corners and reading spaces should contain books that are worthy of being read aloud, which suggests more of a teacher-led approach. Recommendations include not displaying too many books at a time (with the argument that the more choice that is presented to children the less they are likely to engage) regularly refreshing displays and making books easy to find. Promoting and foregrounding the storybooks that have been recently read aloud to the children is another strategy strongly encouraged. In addition, including books from the previous year deemed the children’s favourites is suggested, but the framework argues these should ‘*occupy lower shelves or boxes for children to read and retell again, at school and at home*’ (DfE, 2022:34). However, what appears to be missing, as highlighted both in this study and by Reedy and De Carvalho (2021), is consultation with children about what books they love or would like to read. This idea of consultation was also suggested by Meek (2000:199) who argues convincingly that ‘*one way through the maze is to listen to what children say about their encounters with books they enjoy.*’ Such discussions with children could surface reflections on reading preferences and having these texts in the classroom would engage and encourage the children’s reading habits. Developing this motivation in the children is reflected in the responses by Teacher 1 earlier, who, it could be argued, is a ‘*Reading Teacher*’ (Cremin, 2011:5), someone who shares their reading lives with the children they teach and are perceived as ‘*a teacher who reads and a reader who teaches*’ (Cremin, 2011:5).

A significant challenge for the whole teaching team, in this context, is that the Classroom Book Collection materials largely do not act as ‘*mirrors and windows*’ (Bishop, 1990:1) for the children in the classroom. This reflects issues around book acquisition and funding. However, the teaching team does clearly reflect a ‘*Reading Teacher*’ stance, evident in the classroom in terms of the attention to both the spirit and the letter of reading (Cremin, 2011:5).

Section One: Theme 2

4.2 The Power of the Page: Discourses of Reading

Do not dictate to your author: try to become him. Be his fellow worker and accomplice. If you hang back and reserve and criticise at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read. But if you open your mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other (Virginia Woolf, first published in 1925, republished in 2021, n.p.).

Literacy, as discussed in Section 2.4.1, is, for many, simply defined as the ability to read, write, speak, and listen to make sense of the world (National Literacy Trust, 2020). The OECD (2002:3) stresses its importance, stating that it is not *'only seen as a necessary foundation for performance in other subject areas within an educational context, but it is also a prerequisite for successful participation in most areas of adult life.'*

However, Henry Giroux (1990:85) suggests that knowledge needs to be understood in the context of *'power'* and *'consequently the relationship between writers, reader and texts has to be understood as sites at which different readings, meaning and forms of cultural productions take place.'* Thus, events such as writing and reading are forms of discourse and seen as productive categories that enable *'practices of dialogue, struggle, and contestation'* (Giroux, 1990:85). Taking this position Giroux (1990) strongly challenges dominant views of literacy that reductively convey reading and writing as *'descriptive categories that tacitly support forms of pedagogy which emphasise individual mastery and the passive consumption of knowledge and skills.'* Going further, Giroux (1990:86) argues that when talking about literacy in the sense of learning to read and write it is *'tied to pedagogical practices in which the student is defined primarily as a passive consumer and the teacher is reduced to a dispenser of information parading as timeless truths.'* This idea of the child as passive consumers and subject of social structures (James & Prout, 1997), as noted earlier, contrasts with the idea of the child as a person in their own right, with *'unique, individual features, stressing personal, integrity'* (Mills, 2003:21).

To begin discussing the second theme emerging from the data then, there is a need to explore reading as a multivalent concept that can be conceptualised in multiple ways. Of course, for many people the term reading evokes ideas of deciphering or decoding a text. However, this is only one aspect of the process of reading, which consists of several activities including the ways the visual aspects of books

work. This may also be about engaging with the book as object, for, as noted earlier, Chambers (2011:17) reminds us that children succeed in reading from the *'moment they pick up a book and pay attention to it.'*

4.2.1 Braids of Literacy

The children involved in this project read and engaged with many kinds of narratives and texts across a range of media, all of which augment their narrative and cultural resources (Parry & Taylor, 2018). These child participants live in communities *'where written language is part of our social function as human beings'* (Meek, 1988:4). Therefore, it was unsurprising that the child participants revealed their developing writing capabilities by producing written accounts of their favourite books that demonstrated an array of skills including storytelling (discussed further in Theme 2).

As shown the Scrapbooks offered the children space to write, draw, stick and develop their writing and storytelling skills. The links between reading, drawing, writing, and storytelling are evident throughout the Scrapbook entries the children shared, suggesting that reading enjoyment is not only beneficial to reading but also wider skills (Clark & Teravainen, 2017). An example of this appeared in the Scrapbook of Child 4 who incorporated both illustrations and written text retelling the story of her favourite picturebook, *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* by Michael Rosen and Arthur Robins (1990). One interesting element is that the account begins with an announcement, *'I hope you like my super writing'* which shows a clear sense of a reading audience for this account. In addition, the use of the word *'super'* suggests pride, but also partly acts as an instruction to the reader, so attempting to control reader's responses. After this announcement the account, which demonstrates blended literacy, continues as follows;

A monster book that's said my name and my name is..... and I readed lots of books like Little Rabbit Foo Foo and its said little rabbit Foo Foo rid into through the forest and down cam a good fairy and it said once upon a time in a tiny kingdom there was a man who was king and they had horble sisters and brother. The end.

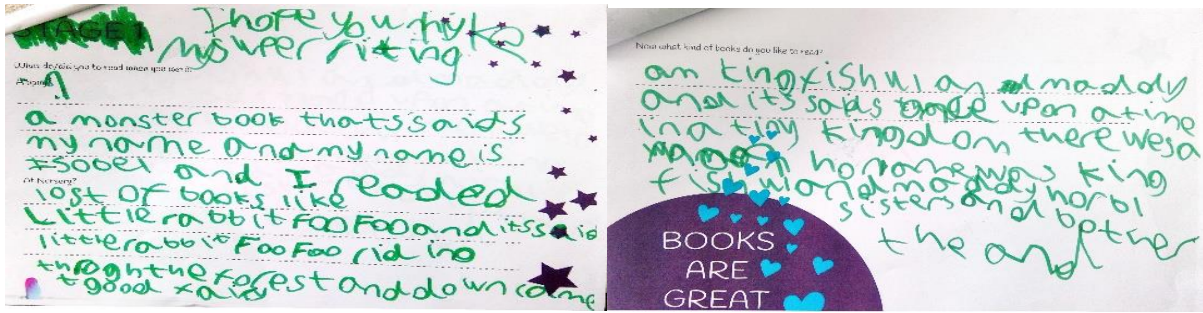


Figure 38. Child 4 (age 5) Retelling of Little Rabbit Foo Foo

Another example of blended literacy was evident in Child 2’s work which combined drawings of Snow White with her written account of the character (See page 145 for the full text).

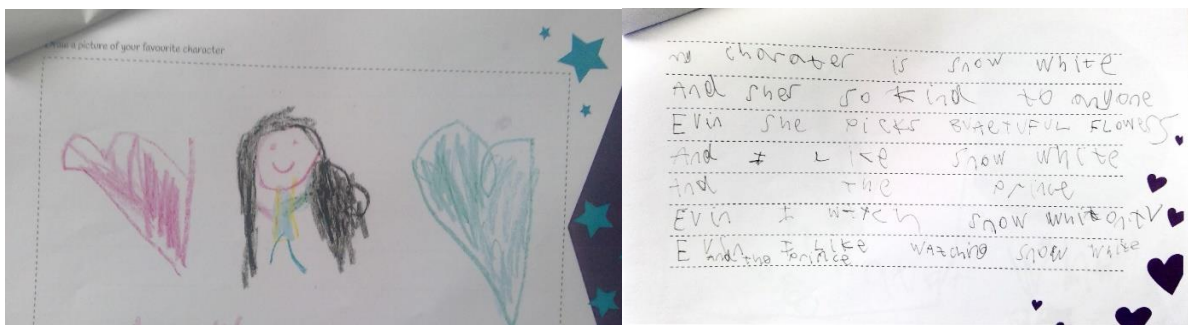


Figure 39. Child 2 (age 5) Snow White

4.2.2 Talking about Reading Literature

The following discussion took place with Children 1, 2 & 3, who, as mentioned were part of an all-girl group of friends and could be referred to educationally as ‘*superengaged*’ (Bovill, 2020:1023). During this part of the chapter, I analyse a literacy event that took place during two child conferencing sessions and the discussions that emanated from them. The literacy event was a storytelling and book sharing activity that could be perceived as a form of object elicitation intended to garner responses about how one reads a picturebook and how picturebooks work. To support this type of activity I brought along a box of picturebooks which included many of their favourite books from their Scrapbooks whilst also introducing new picturebooks by some of the authors they had talked about.

These conversations captured insights into the children’s understanding of the complexities of how a narrative picturebook works, where the *iconic* (images) and *conventional* (text) (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006:1) are two kinds of ‘*storytelling side by side,*’ (Meek, 1988:18) Children, according to Meek (1988:19), look much more closely and pay more attention to detail in stories, in ‘*than their skipping and scanning elders.*’ This activity was designed to let the children talk or as Hammett Price et al.

(2009:171) say, make ‘*extratextual utterances*’ and for the children to help me, the ‘*skipping and scanning elder,*’ into some of the ‘*artist-author’s secrets*’ (Meek, 1988:19). This session allowed the children to make predictions and offer their own versions of what was happening. The children supported each other to freely express their ideas and opinions, empowering them to make complex and thoughtful observations and dialogic responses (Chambers 2011:19) integral to reading and making sense of any text. The book selected for me to read for this ‘*literacy event*’ (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8) was *This is not my Hat* by Jon Klassen (2019).

The story is about a small fish (the narrator) who steals a hat from a bigger fish and then proceeds to boast throughout most of the book about how easy it was to get away with the theft because the big fish was asleep. When the big fish wakes up and notices his hat has gone, he starts to search for it. The little fish hides in some plants but a nearby crab tells the big fish where he is. The end of the book shows the big fish wearing his hat and there is no narration from the little fish. There is a disjunction between the confidence in the little fish’s commentary and the images which show the big fish closing in on him. To begin the conversation, as the first page of the book reveals the narrator, I asked the children who was telling the story and they replied in chorus ‘*the little fish*’ after which they began to give a commentary on what they thought was happening (see comments in italics).

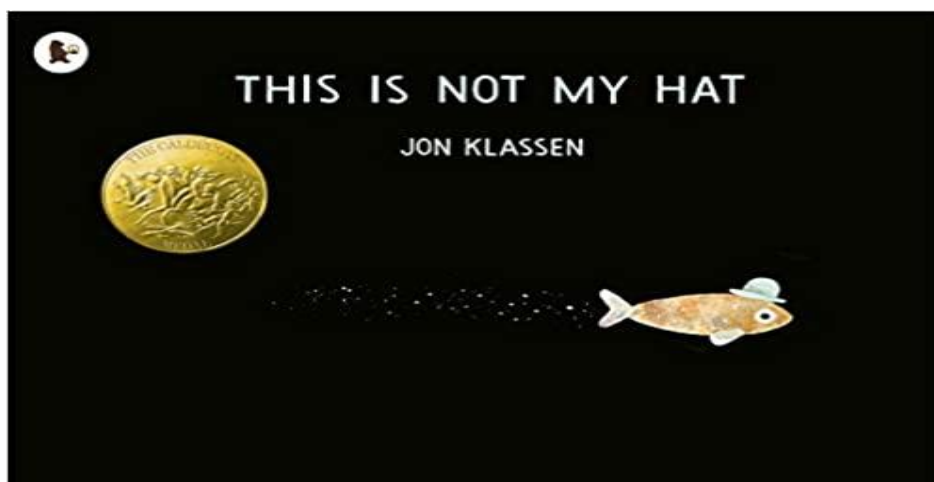


Figure 40. This is not my Hat by Jon Klassen

'His eyes are closed' 'He doesn't even know the little fish has pinched it'



Figure 41. I Stole it from a big fish. He was asleep when I did it & Children's Comments



Figure 42. Images of the Fish & Children's Comments

'He's opened his eyes, ohh no.'

'Then he's looked up to his head and it's gone'



Figure 43. And even if he does wake up, he probably won't notice it's gone & Children's Comments



'He's a bit furious' 'The big fish will be able to find him' 'The crab has seen him and the crab is telling the big fish where to go.' 'That's not nice.' 'The big fish will find him, there's his shadow.' 'He's telling him to go that way and he's gonna get eaten by the big fish.' Finally, one said, 'He's been eaten' and the other children agreed.

Figure 44. So, I am not worried about that & Children's Comments

This differences between text and image made specific demands on the children through asking them to relate *'non-linear reading of pictures to a linear written text'* (Mallett, 2020:6). In this narrative the pictures and words tell different stories, and the children, according to Meek's analysis (1988:10), became *'both the teller (picking up the author's view and voice) and the told (the recipient of the story, the interpreter).'* Virginia Woolf (2021:n.p.) goes further and asks, as cited earlier, whether the reader is a *'fellow worker and an accomplice.'* This relationship between reader, author, and text and the *'symbolic interaction'* that the children demonstrated can be argued to be learned early and rarely ever taught. Whilst adults tend to stand in *'for the author by giving the text a voice when reading to children'* (Meek, 1988:10), these children, having stood in for the author and given the author voice, were both the recipients and the interpreters of the story. To that end, for instance, the children instructed me to watch the big fish's eye because that would tell me what was going to happen. These moments, for me, resonated with my perceived role as *'enabling adult'* Chambers (2011:11), however, in this situation the roles were blurred and inverted where the children took on the role of *'enabling adult'* to ensure I was fully aware of how to read this picturebook. This could be seen as linking with Prout's (2005:66) perspective which disturbs the characterizing of childhood as *'being and becoming,'* by suggesting that both childhood and adulthood should be *'seen through the multiplicity of becomings in which all are incomplete and dependent'* (Prout, 2005:67). During this exchange this perceived oppositional, or binary, relationship between childhood and adulthood was blurred, situating both adults and childhood as *'incomplete and dependent'* (Prout, 2005:67). This framed the child participants as powerful, autonomous and knowing, showcasing their ability to read these subtle and complex systems of text and imagery and their capacity to teach their understanding to an adult. By the subtle use of expression in terms of the big fish, the author was able to offer the possibility of more

nuanced and complex readings of the text. The children participants recognised this technique almost immediately and alerted me to it. The children were immersed in this picturebook and scrutinised both pictures and words going back and forth between the two to piece together meaning (Lewis, 2001), offering ‘*unlimited possibilities for interactions*’ (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006:1).

4.2.3 Empathic Readings

During this ‘literacy event’ the children’s responses to the text were varied. They were concerned about the moral integrity of the small fish and the theft, although they did discuss, between themselves, the explanation for the theft and whether it was justified and if there were any circumstances that might mitigate the act. Despite their rather brutal condemnation of the small fish, they were empathic towards his situation by the end of the book which surfaced their dilemmas and deliberations about taking such a moral stance as well openly demonstrating an empathic reading. Nicola Daly (2021) suggests that books and stories help children make sense of the world around them and help them to understand and tune into the feelings of others, thus implying that reading, in particular picturebook, supports the development of empathy. This is supported by Adam Bushnell (in Gill et al., 2021:xv), who contends that reading teaches children empathy by requiring the reader to look at issues/challenges from other people’s points of view. He goes further and suggests that ‘*teaching children to be empathic towards others is the greatest gift we can impart and reading books is the best way to achieve this*’ (Gill et al., 2021:xv). Picturebooks can, therefore, help children address some of the challenges featured in the text vicariously rather than facing the problem as ‘*raw lived experiences*’ (Mallett, 2020: 4; Oatley, 2003). The consensus was that the big fish ate the little fish, although Jon Klassen left the meaning of the end of the story up to the reader, allowing the reader to control the meaning of a work, so allowing for ‘*plurality of meanings which goes beyond the logical and psychological construction of the text.*’ (Barthes, 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631).

4.2.4 Intertextuality

How and in what ways individuals engage with, and experience texts like Klassen’s, is predicated on the quality of the text, the demands the text makes on the reader (See Sections 2.3.4 & 2.3.5), and of course, the reader’s own experiences of life that they bring to the narrative (Hoffman, 2010, McGillis et al., 2016). Further, Margaret Mackey (2011:290) contends that this is an iterative process where ‘*children use their newly developing awareness of their own world to make sense of their texts and then use their texts to help them observe their own world with more sophisticated eyes.*’ These ‘*bits and pieces*’ of other texts in what they read which feels like they are ‘*sharing a secret*’ with the writer, therefore becoming an ‘*insider in the network*’ (Meek, 1988:22). Sipe (2000) and Meek (1988) contend

that children, at a very young age, start to make these both oral and written intertextual links. These ideas of *'intertextuality'*, according to Kristeva (1980 cited in Sipe, 2000:74) not only refer to the interrelated nature of written and visual texts but also the *'text of one's life as a collection of social and personal experiences.'*

4.2.5 Meta Literacy

This reading event may be perceived as part of everydayness, and so could be understood as unremarkable. However, the discussion was important for these children and offered insights into their lived experiences of their own narrated reading journeys. To further develop the discussion about the book, I asked the participants to consider how they read and make sense of texts in an attempt to capture the children participant's *'meta-literacy.'* This idea was first introduced by Arizpe and Styles (2016:89), when describing how children talk about the ways in which they read literature.

Proficient readers, according to Goodwin (2008:4), are seldom *'conscious of [the] cognitive processes'* they undertake when encountering a new and unfamiliar text. However, in the following discussion the children are confident in talking about the ways they read literature, with a particular focus on visual texts and the thought processes involved in these skills (Arizpe and Styles, 2016:89). They appear, in contrast to Goodwin's assertion, to be very familiar with, and conscious of, these cognitive processes. To begin the conversation, I asked the children to tell me what happens if there are no words on the page to read, just pictures. Child 2 was first to respond, *'you just think about it,'* to which Child 1 (age 5) adds, *'I just like to read in my head.'* Children 2 and 3 then had a conversation about how it happens. Child 2 argued *'you're not reading anything; you're just looking at all the pictures,'* and Child 3 adds, *'and it's in your imagination.'* Going further Child 2 starts to expand upon these ideas saying, *'you say what it looks like and what word would join up with it – in your head.'* Child 3 agrees *'yeah, and you just pretend that the words are actually there.'* In response to this exchange Child 2 recounts memories from when she was younger, *'when I was little I climbed up to the top of my bookshelf and got one of my books and then I got this book that had no words and I just think about all the words that's in my head.'* Continuing in the same vein Child 3 elaborates by saying *'you just read the title then read the pictures.'* Further Child 2 states that, *'you try and think of words that makes you learn more and your head know more, but it might have only words at the start and words at the end'* and Child 3 adds, *'I just look at the pictures and just look what they're doing, you make a story by just watching the pictures.'* In addition to all these comments showing the children thinking through the processes involved in reading, the final idea about *'watching the pictures'* points to multi-literacies

in terms of television and film, inferring similar approaches across visual media, whether moving or still.

On the same day I carried out a similar literacy event with a group of boys who were four years old who also felt just about comfortable enough to share their reading experiences. There were no girls present during this exchange. The event was like that described above although the boys were less confident and constantly reflected on their ability and identity as readers. As a researcher I was mindful and reflexive in my approach given this. This exchange was mostly about confidence with reading and sharing reading experiences. For example, when I asked Child 16 to tell me what happens when he reads, he responded *'I can't read on my own, I tried to. I can only read my own books because they're easy, but they only have one page. I can only do the one page.'* Revealing this made him vulnerable and so when I asked Child 16 to tell me if he mostly reads books with pictures, he initially responded by just saying, *'yeah.'* However, when I asked whether you read books in your head, and how he knew what was happening in the picture, he responded *'it's because I can see them with my own ideas and just make up the story'* a response that is quite comparable to those the previous group offered. Similarly, when I asked the same question of Child 8, he responded, *'I look at the words and the pictures and make up my story, I do it in my head but not out loud, I can see the story.'* Although resonating with the discussion in the first child conference discussed here, the children participants were more reticent in terms of discussing their expertise in understanding how they read. It is evident that this is about self-confidence in reading and so developing the ability to discuss meta-literacy in these literacy events offers space to discuss and demonstrate expertise. Children who perceive themselves as non-readers or that they are failing to learn to read are often characterized as seeing themselves in this light. According to the *Reading Framework* (DoE, 2022) this can lead to children disliking reading altogether.

4.2.6 Summary

These conversations were a fascinating exchange of views about not only in what ways children understand reading visually but also what happens when they do this. However, there were differences that are seemingly about gender, rather than age, which meant the two conversations had different tones.

Barthes (1974) argues that *'writerly texts'* are innovative and provocative texts that go beyond traditional expectations and conventions, which suggests that what is happening in the above exchanges, especially the first, is that intrinsically motivated readers are actively partaking in establishing the potential meanings of the text. There is a genuine understanding, on the part of the

children, of the complex nature of these *'writerly texts'* (Barthes, 1974) and the ways in which texts *'recruit'* (Meek, 1988:14) children's imagination and their understanding of reading literature. This, according to Maryann Wolf and Mirit Barzillai (2009:32) emphasises *'cognitive processes [...] vital for contemplative life [...] that are at the heart of what we call 'deep reading.'* Deep reading is the process of *'reflective engagement and close reading'* (Sheldrick et al., 2018:3) demanding sophisticated processes that include *'inferential and deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection, and insight'* (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009:32). In both literacy events the children demonstrated these skills to varying degrees. In particular, they were able to clearly articulate their analysis, reflections and insights in terms of visual imagery whilst drawing on their earlier knowledge, beyond this text, as they questioned, analysed and probed (Wolf & Barzillia, 2009). To this end they developed their own narratives using the visual imagery as coded text suggesting understanding of complex development where they appreciate their own cognition changes including assimilation to accommodate new ways of seeing (Piaget, 1970 in Parker-Rees, 2010). They were clearly talking about the ways in which they draw on existing knowledge to develop their thinking and noticing skills, which as Child 2 suggests *'makes you learn more and your head know more.'* The children were thinking about the story and retro engineering ideas whilst rewriting the story as they read it (Meek, 1988) aligned to the skills discussed by Wolf and Barzillia (2009).

The participants also discussed the idea of silence and engaging with a story on different levels. For example, Child 2 discusses levels of engagement with stories, by saying, *'if you close your eyes and listen very carefully in your head what you're reading you feel like you're there but you're not but it feels like you are and you know how it feels.'* This discussion is about imaginatively inhabiting a story and the act of concentration, but also refers to empathy.

The children were able to clearly and confidently articulate events carried in the visual. Although the ideas discussed in these literacy events are sophisticated ones for children aged four and five to grasp, I believe their responses show that they do. These findings resonate with research carried out by Morag Styles and Evelyn Arizpe (2001) who explored the multi-layered nature of a single picturebook by Anthony Browne and the sophisticated responses children of various ages brought to interpreting this text. A significant finding from this research was that,

...while some children who were fluent readers of print were good at reading image, it was also noticeable that many children from this study labelled as below average readers were capable of subtle and engaged analysis of visual texts within an enabling environment'

(Styles & Arizpe, 2001:280).

This reflects the findings of this study, to a certain extent, but an added factor is how the children perceive themselves as readers. So, on the one hand, Child 1, 2 & 3 (girl participants) saw themselves as fluent readers, and on the other, Child 16 & 8 (boy participants) labelled themselves as average readers or poor readers. Both groups were capable of subtle and complex analysis of visual texts and were able to talk about how texts work, but only the former group felt they could expand on their initial points, whilst the latter focused on their lack of confidence. These self-labelling practices, associated with classroom practices, also appear later in this chapter and in the next.

In addition to talking to the children about their understanding of how texts work I discussed with Teacher 1 how they support children regarding this. I asked, *'You know when you were talking about the pictures and the images when they first started in reception, did they simply just go along with the words?'* to which Teacher 1 gave an extensive response, saying,

It was more than just recognising the words and still getting them to think about the characters and things whereas now they're picking up things without me saying so they will say about the blank page or what's happening around them or using inference and thinking about how the character is feeling and things like that.' 'I ask them to think about what's gonna happen next and a lot of them tend we'll start off a book and we'll look at the front cover and a lot of them can tell me what's gonna happen or what they think might happen just from the front cover.

This exchange resonates with the identification of Teacher 1 as taking a *'Reading Teacher'* stance (Cremin, 2011:5) which encourages children to move from what Goodwin (2008:4) calls *'the literal level'* (See Section 2.4.5) which focuses primarily on the *letter* of reading. Teacher 1's comment that *'it was more than just recognising the words,'* reflect the higher levels of reading, which are *'beyond the literal'* and *'the personal level'* (Goodwin, 2008:4) which are in turn more associated with the *spirit* of reading. Teacher 1 discusses the children's progress in terms of the development of visual literacy and their ability to predict by drawing on existing schema and understanding as well as the clues the author provides. From these reflections Teacher 1 clearly encourages and supports the children to engage *'beyond the literal'* and move towards understanding on a *'personal level'* of engaging with books.

Section One: Theme 3

4.3 Schooling Literacy: The *Letter* of Reading

Reading may (as discussed earlier) be defined as a text-based activity which is mostly about performing at a specified or expected level that demonstrates a certain proficiency outlined within a measurement paradigm. This paradigm is mostly associated with functional literacy or '*mechanics of reading*' (Ender & Lynch, 2019:10), aspects of reading and reading schemes aligned to the *letter* of reading and the '*standards agenda*' (Cremin, 2011:3). With this measurement paradigm of reading there is inevitable an '*accountability culture*' (Cremin, 2011:3), that often perceives children's engagement as readers and their pleasure in reading, the *spirit* of reading, as '*an optional extra in education, a desirable goal, not necessarily a core professional responsibility.*' The responsibility of working within a measurement paradigm lies with classroom teachers who are required, according to Serafini, (2013:30) to make choices about '*how much time to spend in each curricula area, and the instructional experiences they provide for their students*' and, of course, these choices are value laden.

4.3.1 Reading Instruction in the Classroom

Formal reading instruction has, for many years, incorporated reading schemes which provide readers with controlled vocabulary and '*exposure to phonically regular and high-frequency words*' (Solity and Vousden, 2009:470). Such texts emphasise decoding as the most important skill in early reading. These schemes predominantly focus on '*conventional signs*' (words) rather than '*iconic signs*' (images) (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). This model of reading is beset with ideas of attainment and dependent on statistics, measurement, and techniques (Cremin, 2011). Thus, being able to recognise conventional signs is prized above being able to access reading on a visual level and attaching meaning. Meek (1988:19) sees this issue as embedded in the nature of reading schemes and so asks us to compare the '*textual variety of children's picture books with that of reading schemes.*' Meek (1988:30) argues that measuring and testing reading is largely unrelated to genuine reading development. She suggests that the interactions made possible by skilled writers and artists '*far outweigh what can be learned from books made up by those who offer readers no excitement, no challenge, no real help*' (Meek, 1988:19). Further, and in a firm articulation of her ideology, Meek (1988:19) ardently states '*what texts teach is a process of discovery for readers, not a programme of instruction for teachers.*' These ideas are strongly supported by Giroux (1990:90) who contends that the concept of '*textual authority*' makes explicit the reading process, something which he argues is imbued and inscribed in social relations in the classroom and results in the positioning of texts as objects of knowledge that are to be read in certain ways. These '*dominant reading formations*' tend to limit children's ability to add their own

voices to texts (Giroux, 1990:90). In addition to the muting of children's voices in terms of texts, Harris (2015:27) argues that with regards this aspect of literacy education and children's perspective on the role and value of reading instruction/schemes, children's voices have been '*quite silent.*' Although represented and documented in multiple ways in research about reading, Harris argues that children's voices in terms of their '*reading studies and interactions*' is not quite the same as '*consulting with children and trying to find out directly what children think about what's going on and how things are or are not working for them*' (Harris, 2015:27).

Children's progress in terms of responding to the teaching or remediation that is provided is acknowledged by Jane Oakhill, Kate Cain and Carsten Elbro (2014) as important in understanding whether the aims of the teaching are being met. In the classroom setting the children participating in the research were cognisant of formative assessment of reading comprehension activities that take place regularly, especially the practice of reading out loud to a teacher or teaching assistant, which I observed a number of times, while being assessed in terms of reading proficiency. This meant that, to enable a balanced discussion with them about '*what you read,*' reading schemes and the concept of formal reading instruction (in the classroom and through taking books home) was also part of the research. This was built in to elicit responses with regards to the children's understanding of the function of these texts, so responding to Harris's (2015) criticism that children's voices have been absent when researching these practices. I talked with the children about how they understood reading schemes and began by asking a direct question, '*what are reading schemes?*' to explore how the children participants perceived them and what they thought about the processes initiated by the school. A discussion involving Child 1 and Child 2 highlighted the children's understanding of the role and value of school-initiated reading instruction/schemes and their reflections and experiences of these practices in school. Child 2 explained the process to me from their perspective, saying, '*so you have to get a book from school and then you have to read it at home and then you take it back the next day and you write in your reading record.*' I followed on by asking what the reading record was for, receiving the reply from Child 2 that it was, '*a yellow book to write in to know you've read it and how good you've read it as well.*' Again, this question was followed up to explore who, in Child 1 and Child 2's view, is permitted to complete the reading record. I asked, '*so who fills that in, do you fill that in?*' to which Child 1 said, '*no, the mams and dads or the teachers can sign it but other people can as well,*' with Child 2 adding, '*or, if your mam and dad are really tired you can get your sister or brother they can write in it.*'

This part of the discussion indicated that both children were conversant with the rules and processes about which designated adults were authorised to complete the reading record. However, Child 2 also subverts the school-initiated rules by allowing her seven-year-old sister or ten-year-old brother to sign off her progress in the absence of her parents. In the private space of family, then, both children indicate they have found ways to subvert adult imposed rules. This level of agency would not be afforded, and the children are clearly demonstrating their ability to be autonomous and make choices. Agency, in these terms, is about *'paying attention to children's competence and capability as social actors'* (Flynn, 2016:265) whilst challenging *'traditional models and the developmental discourse of children's incompetence'* (James, 2007:266).

In addition to asking the children participants about their recollections of school-initiated reading instruction, I also asked the teaching team for their reflections on and experiences of these processes. Teacher 2 (Early Years Practitioner) had no recollection of learning to read or whether reading schemes/instruction were used. Teacher 1 could not remember learning to read either, responding *'I can't no – I can't remember anything about it – no.'* However, Teacher 1 could remember being able to read before starting school, saying *'yeah I think so, I think my mam said that I was really interested in reading from a young age but I think it was cos my brother was really interested in reading and he's older, so I used to sit with him and kind of learn from him.'* Teacher 2 responded to the same questions, *'I think so.'* When asked if they could remember any of the books used when they were learning to read Teacher 2 said, *'no, no idea can't remember. We had like stages of books, and we used to go to the library and read and have guided reading time. But I can't really remember them.'* In contrast, Teacher 3 clearly recalled learning to read and what schemes were used, *'yes, I remember learning to read using Janet and John books. I can't really remember the process though.'* Interestingly Teacher 1 when asked if they'd used book bags as a child said, *'no I don't think I had one when I was little – I can't remember actually. I remember having the staged books that we've got here, I remember having those at home but I don't remember actually doing read/writing or anything like that or learning to read at school.'* The memories, then, were very vague, in contrast to the much more focused memories of favourite leisure reading. The first teacher outlines learning from and with an older sibling modelling reading practices, a very different process from that in school. The others remember staged reading schemes, including a title, but, again, that aspect of reading is unfocused, except with regard to the competitive nature of the schemes, as discussed in the following section. This may simply be the action of memory, especially as Teacher 1 filters memory through her mother's account of the siblings reading together, but the contrast with the sharper memories of self-selected

reading (and competition rather than reading) suggests a very different relationship with formal literacy practices and texts.

4.3.2 Competition: A Backwash Effect

One of the potential effects of a testing culture aligned to the Standards Agenda is ‘*backwash*’ (Hughes, 1998:1). If the testing culture is deemed as important and the stakes are high, preparation for testing can come to ‘*dominate all teaching and learning activities*’ (Hughes, 1998:1; Prodromou, 1995). In the following conversation, the backwash is a culture of competition that testing appears to create. During the research, when reading scheme texts were mentioned the focus in the discussion was nearly always on what level individuals had achieved, but there was very little about the actual texts. On these occasions even the discussion became competitive and at times they almost inferred it defined their ability and even their reader identity. During these exchanges, the children participants appeared to slip from being friends to being ‘frenemies’, a portmanteau word combining friend and enemy (most typically a rival). Teacher 2 also referred to memories of this type of competition with reference to reading schemes and stages, recalling:

I think I can remember at school having the scheme books, but it was more like, my memory of it was more like competition against friends to go up to the next stage. But then obviously if you were doing reading for the teacher, they would find out you probably weren't that good to move up a stage.

The following conversation with Child 1 and Child 2 focuses mainly on competition, in terms of which stage each participant had achieved, and the children making qualitative judgements about their own competency and ability referenced against the reading schemes but also their peers. This discussion took place outside in the playground, when the rest of the class were indoors working on specific tasks, as the children suggested that the classroom was too noisy, and they would be able to ‘*think better*’ outside. Child 2 began the discussion by sharing the first entry in her Scrapbook reflecting on what she liked to read when she was at nursery. When I said, ‘*In this part of your Scrapbook you said that you liked Dear Zoo*’, I was corrected and told ‘*It's Bug Balls.*’ When I responded ‘*What's Bug Balls? I don't know that one*’, Child 2 explains, ‘*it's just a book on stage 7 – and I've read it.*’ I then responded ‘*Ahh Stage 7 - Is that one of the books you bring home from school?*’ At this point there was no mention of the actual story in ‘*Bug Balls*’ merely the attributed reading level⁹.

⁹ I have not yet traced this book, so can offer no further publication details.

This response from Child 2 changed the dynamic of the discussion that followed. Child 1 appeared tense, and before Child 2 could respond, jumped in saying, *'so I'm at stage 3'* followed by Child 2 interrupting and reiterating *'I'm on stage 7 and that was my first book I read at Stage 7, and it wasn't that long ago'* after which Child 1 responded, *'I'm not on stage 7, I'm on 3'* (adding clarity). Child 2 then added that her sister, who is a few years her senior, is on *'free read.'* The term or expression *'free read'* usually refers to a child who has finished the school-based reading scheme/instruction and is now allowed to choose from a wider selection of non-scheme/instruction books. The term *'free,'* for these children connotes the alternative to prescribed reading and lacking choice, offering the *'right to read anything'* (Pennac, 2006:145). The conversation was used to show superiority and reinforce it through the use of this post-scheme mechanism achievement within the family.

When I asked the teachers what they thought about the use of reading schemes in the classroom and whether they thought the children enjoyed the process Teacher 1 responded *'yes they do enjoy those ones because I think it follows like a pattern or a story and has the characters.'* This does not reflect the tensions in what the children said, but rests on the content of the texts, which, as noted, were not part of the children's discussions. I also asked about the differential in the children's reading ability given the disparity between the children and Teacher 1 commented, *'just in this class it goes from children on stage 1 up to stage 6 or 7. It's quite a range, the majority are of them are on stage 2 or stage 3 but there is a big range of them.'* This accounts, perhaps, for how sensitive the topic of reading was to Child 2, but also implies an increased level of competition where children might consider themselves winners or losers. This reflects the backwash of using prescribed reading that positions the texts as objects of knowledge to be read in certain ways (Giroux, 1990:90).

To further determine the children participants views about reading scheme books in comparison to their chosen books mentioned in Theme 1, I asked them if the former were different from the latter. Child 2 replied *'yeah,'* and Child 1 responded, *'cos I read different ones in school and like to be quiet.'* When I asked why they liked to be quiet, Child 1 responded *'so I don't read it wrong,'* but when I repeated their words, Child 2 jumped in saying,

Yeah, so my mam and dad, when I read in bed I always want to read in my head. But then my dad comes up and says I want to see how you're doing with your reading and then all I do is like say it wrong cos stage 7 is quite hard now cos I'm on stage 7 I'm the highest stage in the class with my guided reading and no one else is so it's pretty hard on my life.

This latter statement shows a slightly more empathetic understanding of Child 1's view of reading, with an agreement about silent reading. However, Child 2 remains fiercely competitive, emphasises superiority and, simultaneously, outlines both the challenge of staying ahead and how silent reading may be used to carve out private space. Reading in this space is, therefore, constructed as performance, with the text relegated to simply being a script (Zhang et al., 2016:427).

To return to Child 1, what is interesting about this discussion is that throughout the accounts in the previous Themes she shared a lot about her much-loved stories and love of reading. In addition, in the next Theme she talks about *Cinderella's Carriage*, her favourite place to read in the classroom, tells us about who she reads with, and who tells the best stories. She also talks about needing silence to read and developing stories in her head. These elements, combined, tend to define a competent reader as Meek (1988:30) describes. However, reading instruction creates a different reading identity that offers little in the way of agency or autonomy and appears to play a significant role in the ways in which Child 1 sees herself as a reader, in this case a less able one.

These ideas about reading instruction could also be applied to Child 2 who, although perceiving herself as achieving high levels of competency in terms of reading instruction, feels under pressure to perform certain reading competencies. Both of their comments define instructional reading as a specific process where qualitative judgements are made about the performance of the reader. There is also evidence of a sense of right and wrong with regards being able to read, one which calls into question the role and value of reading.

The conversations with the children also flag up their understanding of the Standards Agenda and the Wider Reading Agenda and the expectations and requirements for both activities. Child 2 furthers this discussion when they describe the demands put upon them as emergent readers and how they perceive adult expectations and their own need to perform readership. Reading with the teacher or teaching assistants is often about '*taking the words off the page*' (Chambers, 2011:17), and although Pennac (2006:145) contends that whilst children should have the '*right to read out loud*', he argues they should also the '*right to be quiet*.' The latter could be seen as a right not to be tested, as reading out loud in the context of the Standards Agenda is not about sharing storytelling, but rather about engaging with assessment processes. This contrasts with the nature of the activity '*when teachers read aloud to a class, as they try to replicate for children what it feels like to have someone's undivided attention*' (The Reading Framework, 2022:30) while sharing a story. Reading aloud, then, is also a double-edged activity, depending on who is doing the reading, and why.

4.3.3 Summary

According to Cremin (2011), it is the role of teaching professionals (See Section 2.4.9) to strike a subtle balance between the responsibility to teach reading/literacy and to support and encourage wider reading and reading for pleasure incorporating multi-literacies. To do this, Catarina Schmidt (2018:14) contends, there needs to be an *'acceptance that children may have different starting points in their literacy and that what they are capable of at any point in time may differ.'* These reflections indicate the complexity of the task for the teacher, linking to the previous discussion about *'discourses of literacy'* and the ways in which children navigate complex ideas about it. Key to this process is the selection of *'writerly'* texts (Barthes, 1974) and so choosing books that offer children opportunities to develop their skills in interpreting and analysing texts is extremely important. In addition, the role of family in developing children's literacy should not be underestimated as many of the illustrative examples used were mostly associated by the children with the private space of home.

The research data represents the children's multiplicity of experiences and identities in terms of reading. These multiple reading identities are brought to, and in part created by, classroom practices. The findings argue that the participant children demonstrated literary competence and autonomy (Nikolajeva, 2014), therefore challenging the social construction of the child solely as adult in the becoming. This destabilises the adult power and control often dominant in both private and public spaces.

Reading schemes/instruction were barely mentioned, unless specifically enquired after, and reading scheme books very rarely featured amongst their much-loved books. Two were mentioned in the Holiday Reading Audit, those being *Fun at the Canal* (Hughes, 2009) and *Come on Dad* (John, 2010), but this might have been because they had to read them over the holiday period, rather than choosing to read them. The children participants expressed neither like or dislike for the reading scheme books, rather they had no real opinion on them and barely mentioned them. The only times reading scheme books were mentioned was in relation to competition, and when the children were talking about reading practices in terms of taking their reading bags home and being, as they saw it, compelled to read out loud. The challenges outlined in this theme Angela Anning (2003:5) describes as *'narrow version of literacy in schools'* suggesting there is a real need to *'broaden our understanding of literacy to include young children's representation in graphic and narrative version, influenced by the media and everyday exchanges with siblings and significant adults, that characterise their journeys towards literacy in home settings'* discussed in the previous theme.

Section Two: Theme 4

4.4 The Child & the Reading Environment

Here I consider reading spaces and the complex nature of the ways in which physical spaces are designed and utilised in educational and home contexts. Firstly, after a brief initial revisiting of notions of space (See also Sections 2.5 to 2.6) this Theme examines and debates findings in relation to physical reading environments and spaces in school contexts, drawing on the observational aspects of the project, whilst critically debating space in terms of construction, philosophy, and perception.

The notion of '*space*' has become part of the fabric of research in Social Science discourse and the terms '*space*,' '*children's spaces*,' '*geographies of childhood*,' '*diverse spaces*,' '*spaces of childhood*,' amongst others, are used as informative and engaging ways of considering spatiality (Horton & Kraftl, 2006:84). A central insight from Horton and Kraftl (2006:84) is '*that we live in and through (concrete and imaginary) 'spaces' is common-sense, comfortable and 'right' and scarcely needs explaining.*' However, they do attempt to problematise the language used in terms of describing '*spaces*' suggesting that the term '*space*' is often used to describe typically static, linear, and fixed ideas (Horton & Kraftl, 2006). Therefore, to specify, in this context the term '*space*' will be used to connote complex understandings in terms of the physical, textual, and conceptual, all of which are meant to reflect fluid, dynamic and everchanging environments.

We are reminded by Horton and Kraftl, (2006:82) that learning is not simply about the repetition of facts and discourse or indeed a knowledge of ideas, but rather it is the '*creation*' of an '*atmosphere*' where learning can take place by both children and teachers. Erikson and Markuson, (2007) propose spaces, are and should be, designed to foster and encourage the development of understanding rather than being mere information depositories, which they mostly associate with formal curriculum spaces in the classroom (Clark, 2010: 66). Ensuring a positive atmosphere, then, may involve a variety of materials, places and experiences (Horton & Kraftl, 2006), that contribute to and imbue a learning environment with a quality that ensures children can make sense of their learning (Race, 2014). Roskos and Neuman, (2011:110) suggest that these ideas of space are '*complex social pathways to be mapped, explore and negotiated in establishing routines and creating communities of learners.*' Of course, Roskos and Neuman (2011:110) also remind us that '*what brings the built environment of a classroom to life [...] is the social environment,*' something made clear throughout this chapter.

Within the context of this study and the classroom space, my ethnographic observation of the more formal reading instruction activities revealed they did not have a specific designated space. Rather, instructional reading activities and reading aloud to teaching professionals using reaching schemes occurred in any available spaces in the classroom on any given day. During the following conversations with the children about reading spaces none of them mentioned the process or performance of functional reading activities using reading schemes. Indeed, the children did not make any reference to the *letter* of reading in terms of space at all, which may be because of this need to use classroom space opportunistically for instructional reading activities. In contrast their thinking about reading spaces (See Section 2.5.2) often aligned with the *spirit* of reading and the idea of them as transformational spaces where children are empowered to piece together and synthesise fragments of information into personal knowledge (Erikson & Markuson, 2007). Integral to a well-designed reading space is the capacity to weave both virtual and physical spaces together to encourage children's love of reading.

Consideration will be given later in this part of the chapter to reader spaces and environments created and designed by the children. To allow children to create reading spaces requires adults to relinquish their power. These spaces were predominantly created within the home environment and often described as quiet and private. These children's *'lives are deeply involved in the physical realities of their environment'* (Clark, 2010:12) and this discussion attempts to make explicit the tacit understandings of the rituals, symbols, and routines of spaces.

4.4.1 Children's Environmental Literacy

To begin this discussion, I draw on the work of Alison Clark (2010:120) whose concept of *'environmental literacy,'* is described as the ability to *'articulate views and experiences about physical spaces from the perspective of oneself and others'* (Clark, 2010:121). Here the children participants demonstrate their own *'environmental literacy'* by expressing their views and opinions about physical, conceptual, and textual reading environments. Stage Two of the Scrapbook activities asked the children to draw or illustrate their favourite physical place to read at school and at home and this became the catalyst for them to be able to express their knowledge and understanding of the creation of the physical spaces of both school and home with reference to reading. The thoughts that follow are rooted in ideas of tangible objects and material culture of schools.

4.4.2 *Cinderella's Carriage*: Reading Spaces in the Classroom

The first Scrapbook extracts reflect the children's favourite places to read in their classroom, which was clearly identified in my earlier observations as a site for book related activity. Out of the seven illustrations below, six child participants chose to draw *Cinderella's Carriage*, and one child participant chose the writing table. That this specific reading space dominated, may be due to the female fairy tale character and that all the respondents were female, whether from nursery or reception class. This space, although designed effectively, may have accidentally located reading for pleasure as specifically a female activity (as discussed further below).



Figure 45. child 1 (age 5) Reading Space, Cinderella's Carriage

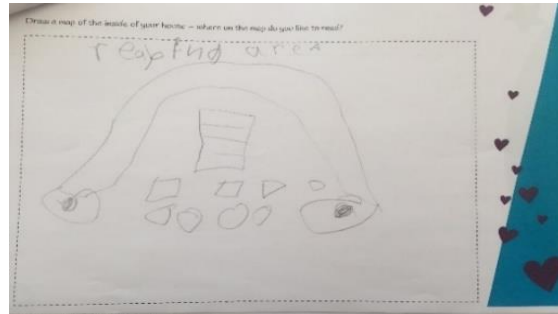


Figure 46. Child 2 (age 5) Reading Space, Cinderella's Carriage



Figure 47. Child 3 (age 5) Reading Space, Cinderella's Carriage



Figure 48. Child 4 (age 5) In the Reading Area

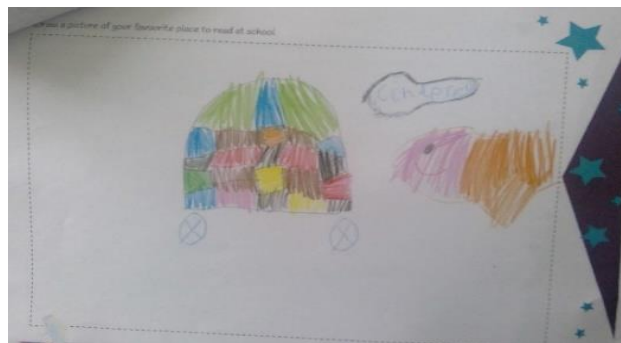


Figure 49. Child 5 (age 5) Cinderella's Carriage

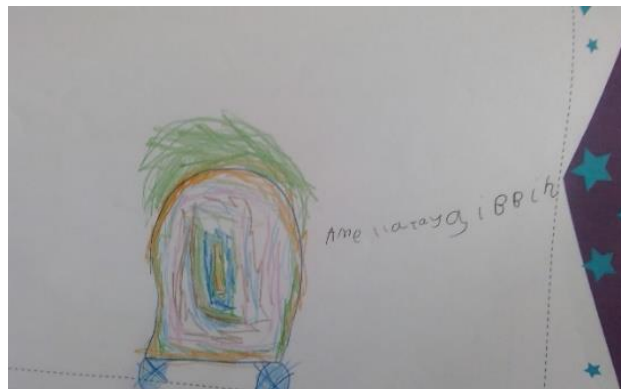


Figure 50. Child 14 (age 5) Cinderella's Carriage



Figure 51. child 13 (age 5) Writing Table in the Classroom

To give an indication of why this space resonated so much with the children who responded, in the classroom context there were two designated physical reading spaces available to the nursery/primary reception children at the time of the research. As shown in the images below, these were the nursery reading space (Figure 52) and the Primary reception reading space *Cinderella's Carriage* (Figure 53).



Figure 52. Nursery Reading Space



Figure 53. Cinderella's Carriage

Both reading spaces in this classroom were organized and created from the perspective/ 'set' of the teachers, providing the children with safe reading environments (Chambers, 2011:22). As the images above, taken during the ethnographic phase of research suggest, the coach creates an enclosed space, whilst the latter is less differentiated from the classroom at large, so perhaps this indicates a non-gendered reason why there was little reference made to the dedicated nursery reading space. Further, the shelving in the nursery was tall (although front-facing) and hard for some of the children to access. In contrast, many of the books in the carriage were in boxes at floor level. The combination of comfort and accessibility had an impact upon usage, with the nursery space being considerably less engaged with.

Cinderella's Carriage was a dome shaped structure filled with cushions, blankets, and picturebooks from the Classroom Book Collection, located in a prominent position within the classroom. Although books from the Classroom Book Collection were read within this reading space, as mentioned in Theme 1, few specific titles from it were referred to during the research, suggesting that it is the space and the environment it created that was most important to the children. Using the Scrapbook entries above as catalysts during child conferencing activities, the children were asked to explain and discuss their drawings and share their personal insights into why *Cinderella's Carriage* was their favourite place to read. Child 1 began by saying 'I like reading in the reading area' and when I asked for clarity in terms of what the reading area looks like, Child 1 responded 'It's the carriage on reception side, I love that one.' I then asked Child 3 if that is where she read and she responded, 'yes it's Cinderella's carriage.' I followed up this question by asking why they liked it in there and Child 3 responded, 'because you get to read and then it's nice and quiet.' Most of the children referred to *Cinderella's Carriage* using terms like 'I love that one' 'nice and quiet' and 'reading on my own', implying both affection and privacy. These views are additionally aligned to Pennac's (2006:145) principle of the 'right to read anywhere,' and also reflects the children's environmental literacy. Interestingly, *Cinderella's Carriage* was perceived by both the teaching team and the children as beyond the gaze of the teaching team, so it was conceived of as different to the more formal 'curriculum spaces' (Clark, 2010:66).

Researcher Reflections/Observations

Whilst all children had the opportunity to use the ‘*Cinderella Carriage*’ reading space, the boys both from nursery and reception, tended to avoid the ‘*Cinderella Carriage*.’ My interpretation of this anomaly was that, from my observations, the space was constantly occupied by the girls and therefore may not have been perceived as an accessible space for the boys. Another interpretation of the use of this space could be that it is associated with ‘*Cinderella*.’ Thus, the boys in the classroom may perceive the space as specifically gendered.

Having observed the ‘*Cinderella Carriage*’ being predominantly occupied by nursery and reception girls, I noted throughout my time at the setting the girls telling the boys to be quiet when they were near the carriage (*discussed later in this theme*). Another observation was that the boys in the setting, if they wanted to read, simply stopped where they were with their book and sit on the floor or chair and just read. Although this was not necessarily a frequent occurrence. This does call into question the notion of gender, with important points to be made with regards the idea of gender, space, ownership, and identity which have been referred to throughout. On returning and reviewing this section of the Scrapbook activity that asked about their favourite reading environment, it could be argued that the disparity in responses in terms of gender, could be attributed to the activity itself. On reflection the Scrapbook entry may not have been as clear as it could be, with the mapping exercise perceived a where can you read rather than where do you like to read. The disparity in the wording of the activity may have confused the children participants.

4.4.3 Practitioner’s Perspectives on Classroom Reading Spaces

The spaces, pictured above, reflect specific attitudes and preferences in terms of what is important to the teaching professionals when creating reading environments, which, according to Roskos and Neuman (2011:110) is both ‘*an art and a science*.’ As mentioned in Section 2.5.2, Chambers (2011:22) distinguishes between two key conditions that determine whether activities are enjoyable or not, the ‘*set*’ and ‘*the setting*.’ The setting is defined as the physical surroundings and environment which is created and visualised by the set of the individual professional working within the space. Chambers also suggests that schools need to manage spaces in ways that support children to read regularly by ensuring their ‘*concentration is protected*’ (Chambers, 2011:19). These ideas form the basis of the following discussions held with individuals, of various ages, who read willingly and are passionate about the role and value of reading for pleasure, (their ‘*set*’) and enthuse about and create comfortable

environments devoted to engaging others in reading for pleasure (the ‘*setting*’) in specific surroundings (which Chambers described as ‘*place*’ (2011:19)).

This reading environment was designed and created by the reception class teacher, Teacher 1, which again reflects her status as a ‘*Reading Teacher*’ (Cremin, 2011:5), someone who shares their reading enthusiasm and is cognisant of the importance of engaging and encouraging children. Consequently, gaining her insights into the individual *set*, in terms of her philosophical perspective of developing reading spaces and environments, was valuable.

Emm, for me it would be somewhere like we’ve got [Cinderella’s Carriage], somewhere cosy where they can feel kind of safe where they can read something like that with lights and stuff they really enjoy that and somewhere that they have just the freedom to choose lots of different books that they like, like non-fiction and fiction and the boys love the dinosaur books that we’ve got in there and things, they love exploring them and just a range of books that they can use and puppets and lots of things (Teacher 1).

These comments show an emotional driver behind the space, with feeling safe being key, as well as space being somewhere that offers children the autonomy to choose different books, although still within the constraints of the Classroom Book Collection (See Sections 4.0.5 and 4.1). These comments highlight Teacher 1’s attitudes and experiences (their *set*) of what is necessary to create a reading space that support children to develop their own reading experiences and storytelling capabilities. The *set* with this teacher is aligned to how the children experienced this reading space. The children participants, as noted above, used expressions like ‘*nice and quiet*’ and ‘*reading on my own*,’ with the word ‘*love*’ also being used. The terms ‘*cosy*’ and ‘*safe*’ also evoke similar ideas about privacy and quiet.

Additionally, the ‘*setting*’ ‘*can change a set of mind, swaying it for or against an activity*’ (Chambers, 2011:22). Therefore, when developing reading activities or environments it is important to ‘*consider how each feature of the reading environment may affect the set of the children it is intended to support*’ (Chambers, 2011:23). When considering *Cinderella’s Carriage* through this lens, this reading environment does reflect what Chambers (2011:22) refers to as the ‘*set*’ of the individual. However, that Teacher 1 and the most vocal supporters of the carriage were female shows an unintended gender bias in its creation, with the teacher perhaps projecting memories of girlhood reading into the mixed-gender space of the classroom. Further, (See Section 4.4.7) some of the boys responded to this reading space by making a lot of noise nearby, attempting, in a sense, to disrupt the girls’ sense of ownership

and use of the space. This suggests that it was quite contested or perhaps seen as favoring girls and their reading preferences.

A new nursery reading space was, at the time, under construction, and the space available was a bookcase and sofa incorporated into the classroom space (See Figure 52). During an interview with the Nursery Teaching Professional, Teacher 2, she admitted '*I wouldn't want to go and sit in it, I don't think it looks comfortable, I don't think it looks inviting. It's a work in progress.*' The teacher's lack of comfort was reflected in my observations and in the accounts of the children where the space was absent and even reading at the writing table was preferable (See Section 4.4.2).

The new space under development was subject to much thought. For example, Teacher 2 talked about, during one interview, the opportunity she was given to visit a local nursery in the area to look around and get ideas and inspiration in terms of redesigning the nursery reading space. Here is an extract from that discussion.

They had branches in different areas of the nursery with leaves tied through or like tissue paper so it looks like blossom and fairy lights and it was all like hanging down from the ceiling and it's all just bringing outside in and there was a willow one but because I don't think the leaves drop on the willow branches and it looked incredible and in the creative area they have the same sort of thing with the branches painted really bright colours and it was really lovely (Teacher 2).

However, although interesting in terms of aesthetics, what the teacher said did not really surface their set-in terms of reading spaces and environments and the discussion was much more focussed on the setting. Further discussion raised issues about the necessity to use this space for multiple classroom activities, which I had also observed, as when Teacher 2 stated that,

I think something like that but really comfortable and drapery but then I've still got to use it as my circle time area as well. I'm hoping that the displays which I could use the cave one. It's just space. It's got to serve two purposes.

This raised key challenges professionals face regarding spaces that potentially have multiple identities, functions, and purposes. This can be problematic though, as when spaces within the classroom are multifunctional, they often signify to children a blurring of those different identities and purposes, and formal and informal spaces boundaries. It is these genuine restrictions, such as the amount of space, the existing infrastructure of the building and access to resources that at mean that at some point '*teachers confront what is and is not possible in the classroom environment they inhabit with their*

students' (Roskos & Neuman, 2011:110). This battle to ensure space worked for teachers and children, but also curriculum, was also flagged up when Teacher 2 mentioned that they considered the development of the space in terms of incorporating current Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum themes as well as integrating the children's work.

My vision is really about keeping the gazebo, draping materials over having all these branches with the fairy lights and just making it look more inviting.... they've been doing traditional tales and they've been making things from the different books, so we've got the Three Bears from Goldilocks we've got the Gingerbread Men we're gonna do the Enormous Turnip... that's gonna all be hessian, calmer natural. Their work stands out much more on it, they notice it and they're proud of it and they go 'look at my work' (Teacher 2).

This teacher subsequently did spend time designing a reading space for the nursery children that linked to features of the Early Years Foundation Stage as well as representing the natural world, in addition to displaying and foregrounding the children's work.

Further, the School Literacy Lead Teaching Professional (Teacher 3) was also interviewed, but rather than just focussing on the reading spaces and environments like the other two teaching professionals, they added thoughts on the different types and genres of reading materials available for the children in the spaces, reflecting their role, stating that,

They need to be developed e.g., lots more reading sources such as comics, menus, magazines etc. They need more print. They need more comfortable spaces and opportunities to read in a range of areas e.g., 'the construction area' (Teacher 3).

Teacher 3 voices concerns about the Classroom Book Collection and the lack of different genres and media included amongst the texts, arguing that more consideration was needed regards the availability of a range of texts in the classroom that need to reflect the children's reading choices (See Section 4.1.6). However, what is significant here is that Teacher 3 also sees comfort as important (so adding to that theme amongst both children and teachers) and having a range of reading spaces. Whilst not directly stated, this latter implies a recognition that *Cinderella's Carriage* may not suit all readers and that boys might settle to read in a different kind of space.

Teacher 3 suggested that designated classroom spaces could be utilised as reading spaces including spaces. The idea of using existing dedicated learning spaces as alternative reading spaces and environments can be convenient and offer a solution to limited space, although it may be confusing, as already noted above. For many practitioners, including those in this setting, the constraints of

existing infrastructures were challenging given that there were ‘*complex social pathways to be mapped, explored, and negotiated when establishing routines and creating communities of learners*’ (Roskos & Neuman, 2011:110). Such challenges are not insurmountable but do pose issues for practitioners in creating and establishing learning/reading spaces that are useful and useable to all members of the learning community. In terms of developing reading spaces, the International Literacy Association (ILA) in the Standards Document 2018 (Standard 5 updated version), reinforces the necessity to create dedicated ‘*Literate Environments*’ that ‘*foster and support children’s traditional print, digital, and online reading and writing achievement.... a literate environment that meets the diverse needs of students and facilitates connections across content areas as well as with the world outside the school.*’ It is acknowledged by teaching practitioners that this is the desired use of space within the classroom, it is not always possible to achieve. These anxieties about the having enough space for designated learning environments are as Roskos and Neuman (2011:110) suggest ‘*first, last and always*’ among pedagogical concerns. Ideas about changing the focus of designated spaces, whilst expedient, may not provide the children with reading spaces that encourage and engage reading for pleasure, again suggesting how spatial, educational, and intellectual issues are intertwined.

The teaching professionals were somewhat at odds, as their accounts suggest, about what makes a good reading environment. Teacher 1, who created *Cinderella’s Carriage*, seemed to be aligned to the more vocal and engaged children’s perspectives, incorporating the feel of the space, safety and the freedom to choose different books within the constraints of the texts available (the latter being seen as like the more prestigious ‘*free reads*’ that were permitted after reading scheme books had been completed). In contrast, Teacher 2 concentrated more on the aesthetics of the reading space with the focus being the curriculum and the necessity to utilize the space in multiple ways. Teacher 3 focused predominantly on the texts available within any given space as the priority, including incorporating different genres, whilst being able to consider available space as multivalent. In terms of reading spaces in the school context the children who contributed, in contrast to the adults, were unanimous in their discussion about the merits of *Cinderella’s Carriage* and in their definitions of a good reading space. However, as noted above, gendered assumptions around reading may have come into play here, although it is clear that whatever these spaces and environments for children look like within a classroom context, they need, according to the child participants, to offer quieter spaces within the setting (discussed further in Section 4.4.7).

4.4.4 Reading Spaces at Home

The children participants were also asked where they like to read at home. The participant children tended to outline two reading spaces and environments associated with home: indoors and in the garden, if they had access to one. My first realisation when looking at the responses was that there was a considerably bigger volume of Scrapbook responses and subsequent conferencing discussions that focused on the home. Further, in the previous discussion there was little reference made to what books they chose to read in the classroom space, but at home book and space became intertwined. In addition, the way that the children chose to express themselves about the home reading experience was often different, again reflecting different feelings about the home space.

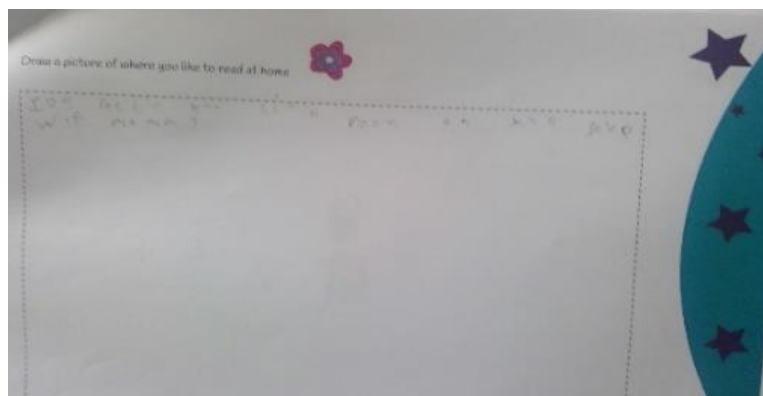


Figure 54. Child 1 (age 5) The Living Room



Figure 55. Child 1 (age 5) My Bedroom

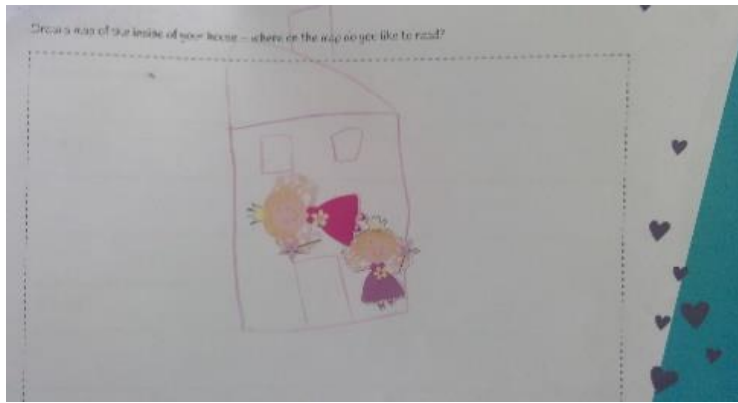


Figure 56. Child 3 (age 5) The Bedroom

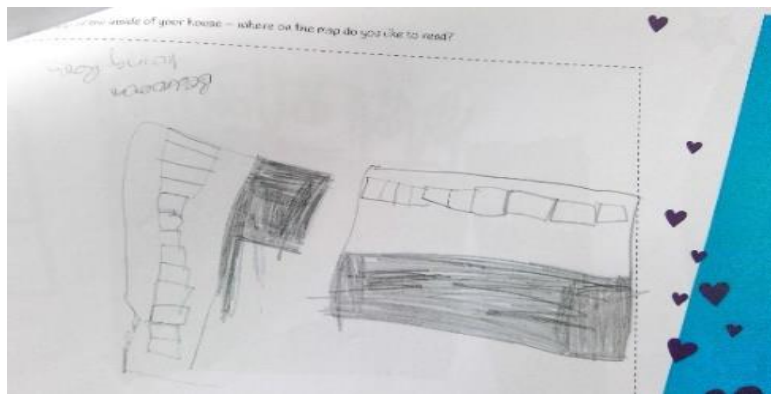


Figure 57. Child 4 (age 5) The Living Room

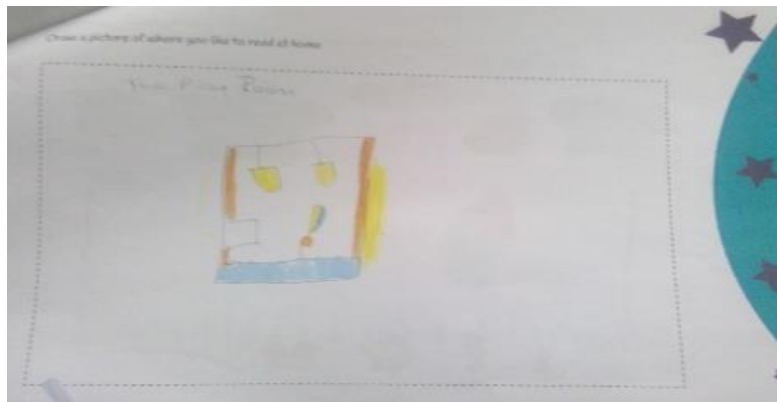


Figure 58. Child 5 (age 5) The Playroom



Figure 59. Child 8 (age 4) The Bedroom

I used the Scrapbook entries as the stimulus for discussion, asking the children to tell me about their pictures. While Child 3 explained, *'it's my bedroom'*, Child 2 hesitated to respond and instead of explaining her picture, asked, *'can I use speech bubbles in mine – is that okay?'* This response from Child 2, given her usual confidence, was surprising. In a very positive sense, it demonstrated her creativity in using different medium from comic book texts to illustrate a point in her Scrapbook, showing another form of literacy skill. However, her uncertainty suggested two things. The first might be that comics were perceived as less valuable reading materials, so she might be risking her assertions of reading superiority. In another reading, this comment was concerning as it suggested that the adult/child power dynamic within the research environment had not diminished as much as I had hoped, and I was seen as an adult who might disapprove of this mode of communication. This made me question why she felt she lacked autonomy and felt compelled to ask permission. From the outset of this research project I had always attempted, as discussed earlier, to undermine adult authority and power by tuning into the children participants *'culture of communication'* (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & James, 2017:2) and locating the research in a neutral space within, or beyond, the classroom. Although throughout the previous discussions I considered that I had achieved the latter, this, seemingly insignificant comment, challenged my perception of what had been achieved. My attempt to genuinely be present with the children, listening to their voices and experiences, I felt as this point had faltered. However, in reflecting upon this moment I was reminded of the sensitivity and genuine concern the children had about including me in their activities, in particular the reading activities, and sharing their enthusiasm and passion for reading to ensure that I didn't feel left out. Consequently, while reinforcing my mindfulness about power differentials, I also reconfigured this question as Child 2 checking, or asking me to make explicit, tacit rules about completing the Scrapbook given she was now using a previously unused grammar, that of the comic, to express views within it.

There was a great deal of comfort, company, and emotional warmth in most of the responses, as exemplified by the account of Child 1, who said, when reflecting upon her drawing, *'I love reedin in the living room on the sofa with mammy.'* It is well documented that children's reading and fluency has been linked to home and family environments with aspects considered such as parental educational attainment, parents as readers (Cremin et al., 2014), parents reading to their children and the availability of reading materials (van Bergen et al., 2016). Another theme was privacy, or personal space, as shown by Child 4's comments. Child 4 reads on her own when away from home, but at home tends to read with parents. She also uses reading to create a space that does not include her baby sister. As Child 4 says, *'I read on my own but not wen I go home and read with mum or dad ... but not my baby sister. She's a baby and only is one and she will rip it all up.'* The other main space was, as Child 8 suggested *'I like to read in my bedroom.'* These conversations exposed family traditions about reading in the shared spaces of home like the living room, with particular focus on the comfortable space of the sofa and reading in bedroom spaces. Regarding the latter, if that information was not immediately offered, I asked which books they liked to read when they go to bed. This varied, but there were often favourites, so whilst Child 4 initially responded *'I read all of mine'*, Child 1 responded, *'I read Cinderella,'* Child 5 said, *'I read 'Can't you sleep little bear'* and Child 4, after thinking for a little while added a specific title, *'Princesses and Princes.'*

4.4.5 Children Designed Reading Spaces & Materiality

To return to the reading space discussed by the children in Section 4.4.2, *Cinderella's Carriage* was created and developed by the teachers, *for* the children rather than *with* the children. This change in preposition indicates a significant shift in perceptions of adult/child status relating to competency and voice.

During the research, I observed the children participants creating reading spaces in different places, for instance, a particular favourite was outside in the playground near the sandpit. I was included on occasion, and we typically gathered a blanket and a range of picturebooks and created a pop-up reading space. The rationale for the use outside space was always (irrespective of which child initiated the discussion) that the classroom was too noisy, and as Child 1 and 2 asserted earlier, outside they would be able to *'think better.'* As a result of this practice and choice, several child conferencing discussions in phase two took place outside in the playground with small groups. The children were often very excited during these discussions, in part because of the different space, with ideas bouncing from one child to another. Their ideas were different in respect of environment, but there were significant commonalities, for instance, that the space needed to be enclosed.

Child 1 and 2 discussed developing their own bespoke reading spaces within their homes, specifically in the living room and their bedrooms. These children designed and built their own reading spaces using material artefacts such as blankets and bean bags inside their tent-like structures or dens. These conversations opened discussions about their preferences in terms of materiality and reading. Child 2, for instance, when asked about the where of reading, responded *'emm probably I get my bean bag from in my room and my little blanket and then I lost the tent though.'* I then asked about the tent and Child 2 elaborated, saying, *'yeah I had a tent but I lost it and I loved to read in that.'* Further, when I asked Child 1 what they liked to use when creating a reading space, they responded, *'I have the same as C2.'* Child 2 then added, *'I haven't got a princess blanket, but I normally like but I used to like to read like I get my tent out and get my bean bag in there and then I used to have a princess blanket and it got away and it had to go in the bin, it was dirty and it got ripped.'* The creation of these reading spaces was not confined to a particular space in the home, and the children said they used the living room or bedroom. However, both children preferred reading in their bedrooms when asked if they prefer being read to or reading on their own, with Child 2 responding *'I like reading on my own in my tent.'*

The idea of the camp or den was a common theme. Here one of the nursery children talks about building a camp and creating their own reading space. Child 8 said *'I like to make a camp with cushions and blanket and I get in and read.'* It seems that, access to materials allowing, the child participants preferred to design their own reading spaces, often with privacy in mind, and specifically spaces where they could crawl inside and read alone. The spaces they created were deliberately and consciously autonomous spaces, highlighting the importance of factors like as privacy and quiet, where they could make choices about the texts they read. These material artefacts of reading such as the blankets, cushions, and picturebooks the children participants mention when developing their reading spaces, although they may seem mundane, are clearly important to the children in terms of ownership and autonomy.

The physical reading spaces of the bedroom and the living room were typically used by the children in different ways. Whilst the children use physical space as comfort and an opportunity to spend time with parents, or other family members (Anning, 2003), reading together, they are also creating their own reading environments with a view to escaping parental supervision, to have ownership of not only how it is designed but also who is allowed, what was read there and when they read. The children further offer some fascinating insights into their own personal reading practices that are not necessarily aligned to their parent's ideas about reading. For instance, when Child 1 and Child 2 discussed reading at home, Child 2 began the conversation by explaining her own home reading practices, *'once my mam*

and dad have gone out of my room when it's bedtime, I unlock my duvet cover on my bed and I get inside and read.' I followed up by asking *'in your duvet cover?* Child 2 responded, *'yeah that's what I do, and my mam and dad tells me off, though.'* Child 1 added *'Yeah that's what I do.'* When asked if they needed a torch Child 2 said *'I can still see,'* and Child 1 agreed, saying *'I can still see without my torch.'*

In this subversion of parental bedtime rules there was again an element of imitation and competition between the children participants (See Section 4.3.2) with Child 1 agreeing and copying Child 2 who was perceived as the stronger and more accomplished reader. However, they shared a close bond, and both demonstrated that when it comes to making decisions about reading, they felt able to make choices about which texts to read or explain what constituted a reading environment in which to engage in reading for pleasure. The children predominantly created these reading spaces within the home environment, often described throughout the research as seeking silence, a quiet private space to read and think, so avoiding surveillance.

4.4.6 Finding Silence at Home

The children participants discussed reading as a solitary pursuit with the optimal conditions and environments that are conducive with reading for pleasure, often conflated with in the children's comments with *'reading in your head'*. Many of the children mentioned the need for silence as a prerequisite to enjoying reading, following the storyline, and understanding texts. Their Scrapbooks suggested that it was at home where these conditions were most achievable.

Simultaneously, though, home was also perceived as a space where the children performed reading, so linking to Theme 3 about reading instruction. At this point, the awareness of reading being measured for school made it less pleasurable.

However, there were factors that made reading aloud at home hard, especially, once more, noise. So, when I asked the children *'what happens when you take your book home in your book bag, do you read with your mam and dad?'*, Child 1 responded immediately, *'no, cos they always be noisy and they say to my little brother don't be noisy when (Child 1) is reading'* with Child 2 adding, *'I read in my bed.'* Child 4 interrupted saying, *'and if someone is making a noise when you're doing your homework and if you're reading a book and someone is making a noise emm and talk to them they might miss the page that they are on.'* Child 2 agreed with this and added, *'if someone's being noisy when you're doing your homework you just like turn loads of pages and you don't remember anything.'*

As part of this discussion, then, the children participants talked about the need for silence, both for personal reading, but also to enable concentration when reading was homework.

4.4.7 A Quest for Silence at School: Reading Choices and Practices

Returning to Reedy and De Carvalho's (2021:141) research with primary aged children, in addition to the theme of '*children's agency and choice*' discussed in Section 4.1.6, the children talked about their understandings of '*the reading environment*'. Reedy and De Carvalho's research identified that the children showed clear preferences for '*reading at home as opposed to reading at school*' (2021:141). In line with my research, they too found that the children found that the '*volume of noise created by other children as school can have a negative impact on their enjoyment of reading*' (Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021:141). This reference to '*noise*' refers to unwanted or unattended sound present in children's environments, something particularly common in classrooms (Erickson & Newman, 2017:451).

There is often a perception that children need constant stimulation and noise to ensure they are being entertained, and indeed educated, and the setting reflected that in being busy, loud and filled with activity. This notion leads to a view of a childhood that constructs it as never switching off or as inherently impatient and doing. These constructs and ideas were evident in the setting as children were observed engaging in several educational activities and tasks simultaneously, aligned to curriculum. The children participants' comments militated against these associations of childhood with noisy spaces filled with constant activity. Instead, the children participants talked about their quest for silent reading spaces and privacy. Physical silence, or at least quiet, was what the child participants wanted to enable them to immerse themselves in their chosen texts. So, when I asked if the children liked to read with other people, Child 1 answered, '*no, just on your own.*' In addition, the reading spaces developed by the children are a space that allows for independent private reading, for as Child 2 said, '*I like reading on my own in my tent.*'

The quest for quiet was exemplified by an exchange where the children participants talked about trying to find a space to enable silent reading. The discussion was located in a busy part of the classroom, so I asked the children if they liked reading in this space and Child 3 was the first to respond with a definite, '*no.*' When I asked why, Child 3 said '*Cos it's too noisy,*' a response echoed by a chorus of children. Child 4 added, '*cos there's loads of people.*' Child 2 expanded on the discussion, '*and every time you go to the reading area [Cinderella's carriage] it's too noisy and people make a lot of noise and James gets the guitar out and goes like dong, dong, dong (they all laugh),*' Child 4 '*and Jack sings*', Child 2 adds '*he doesn't sing he just shouts.*' The children all start to giggle. '*Cinderella's*

Carriage’ is being discussed in terms of being spoilt by the classroom milieu. The noise Children 2, 3 and 4 refer to is from a group of nursery and reception boys that surfaces tensions in terms of reading spaces, gender and ownership.

This quest transcends most of the themes so far, in that multiple references throughout the research were made to ‘*silence*’ and ‘*quiet*’ by the children participants, mostly explicitly linked to ideas of choice and agency. Kristin Conradi, Bong Gee Jang and Michael Mckenna (2014:154) through their ‘*systematic review of motivation-related terms,*’ led to their definition of agency, in terms of reading, as ‘*a reader’s perceived capacity to determine involvement in reading processes and activities.*’

This capacity and determination were evident when the children discussed their personal reading practices and pursuit of silence in both within the classroom and home environments. Calm environments are much more conducive with concentration and interacting with texts, and when children are reading and writing, it is acknowledged that a noisy environment does little to help them concentrate on their chosen activities (*The Teaching Framework*, DfE, 2022). This surfaces a contradiction at the heart of classroom practice (and busy homes), where there is a tension between socialization, group work, individuals, and concentration. This too also has implications for the use of space and school architecture, and asks whether, in many cases, schools are built that offer enough variety in terms of types of space, given the numbers of children they may contain.

This Theme crosses over, to an extent, with Section 4.2.2, where I referred to another kind of silence. In terms of meta-literacy, engagement and reading practices, many of the children agreed that ‘*reading in your head,*’ is their preferred option. For example, Child 2 expanded on this point saying, ‘*my sister does that all the time, she’s 10, she reads in her head all day when she’s reading Harry Potter books or something*’. She added, ‘*She reads all alone and when I come in her room and I’m like I wanna hear that story.*’ Child 2 took up the theme, ‘*But she just reads in her head, (Child 1) reads in her head, and I read in my head.*’ In this case, reading silently could be seen as about maturity as a reader, and so aspirational, but also about privacy, yet in this instance, silence can also be interpreted as relief from the constant surveillance of reading (Steeves & Jones, 2010).

Here reading is constructed as a solitary pursuit that requires optimal conditions and environments that are conducive with ‘*reading in your head*’ (discussed in Section 4.2.2). Many of the children mentioned the need for silence as a prerequisite to enjoying reading, following the storyline, and understanding texts. In addition, in terms of performativity, the children militated against the idea of reading as a performance or test. This part of the theme is echoed in the research by Reedy and De

Carvalho (2021:142) whose children participants suggest that the pressure of reading aloud with others and the constant monitoring and performance aspect has a negative impact on their enjoyment of reading and subsequently the children did not associate reading at school with reading for pleasure.

Section Three: Theme 5

Story telling is something we all do and understand. The habit is so deeply sunk in us, historically and culturally, that we recognise our common humanity in all the tales we tell and hear, from childhood to old age, waking and dreaming. (Meek, 1996:22)

4.5 Communities of Readers: Sharing Stories

A considerable amount of our everyday lives as human beings is consumed by telling, listening, reading, and watching, stories unfold (Booker, 2004). Home and family literacy practices, including *'joint or shared reading'* (Zhang et al., 2016:424), can influence the amount and types of literacy knowledge children bring to school. This is because, as Hammett Price et al., say *'Parents mediate texts'* with their children to support and encourage their interactions with textual content and illustration (2009:171).

This storybook reading environment can also be seen as *'reciprocal, dynamic and mediated by children's maturing linguistic capabilities'* (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002:395). Book sharing of this type is often one's first reading community and can also be considered a *'literacy event'* (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8) creating a *'dynamic context'* between the parents, the child and the book and the interactions between these components (Hammett Price et al., 2009). Indeed, storytelling and book sharing begins in babyhood with the *'rhythms of a short story'* and accompanying pictures and, with the repetition of these stories and images, *'words begin to emerge'* and it is these early experiences that shape future communication skills, along with social and learning skills (Attenborough, 2008:13. Zhang et al., 2016, McCormick and McIntosh, 2020). These early storytelling and book reading activities introduce *'structure and language patterns that help to form the building blocks for later reading and writing skills'* (Attenborough, 2008:13).

Alongside book sharing lies the tradition of oral storytelling, one of the *'most ancient artforms ... a vibrant part of culture throughout the world'* (Society for Storytelling, 2022: n.d.), which may also form part of a reading community. Being told stories (rather than being read them or being tested by being made to read them aloud oneself) can be compelling, with any age group, for most people will *'sit with rapt attention in the presence of a good storyteller'* (DfE, *Teaching Framework*, 2022:30).

Traditional tales and fairy tales, which have appeared at various points throughout this thesis, started in this way until the invention of print when they became a more of a fixed text, resulting in the

emergence of the '*conventions of telling and reading*' (Zipes, 2011:221). That said, the fairy tale and traditional tales evaded the tendency to be dominated by print and continued to be altered and diffused throughout the world by oral storytelling and through other media. However, professional storytellers according to Alistair Daniel (2007:736) are often asked '*so, you read stories to the children, do you?*', suggesting the dominant construct of storytelling is one of story being mediated through text rather than the oral storytelling that is an integral part of our social and cultural interactions.

Storytelling of various kinds, but especially reading books aloud, also plays a key role in teaching. However, during this kind of storytelling there is often an explicit teaching of words which can interrupt the flow of the story (Vaahtoranta et al., 2019) as I had observed. This, according to Enni Vaahtoranta, Jan Lenhart, Sebastian Suggate and Wolfgang Lenhard (2019:2), is about swapping from a '*narrative story genre to a non-fictional encyclopaedic genre*', which may result in distracting listeners from the story or spoiling listening motivation. This, then, can undermine the power of the narrative and reduce it to an instructional text that is not necessarily about immersing the reader in the narrative, but rather using the narrative as an instructional tool discussed previously in terms of the *letter of reading*.

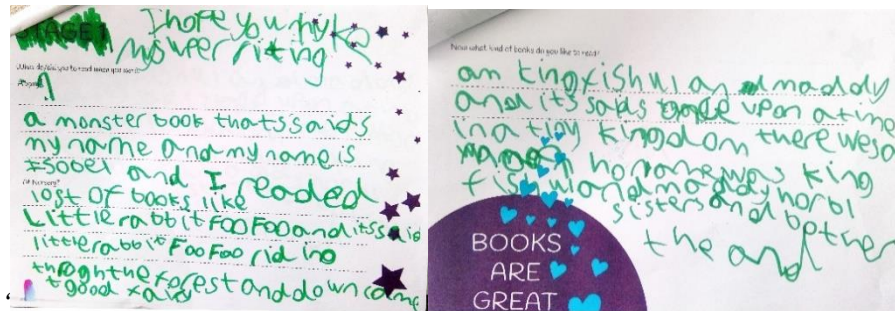
In addition, as part of the '*Early Learning Goals*' outlined in the '*Early Years Foundation Stage*' (2021:13) children need to be able to anticipate key events in a story and demonstrate an understanding of retelling stories and narratives in their own words. Meek (1988:10) adds to this conversation when she suggests that for children to learn to read, they need to be both '*the teller*' of stories by picking up on the author's view and voice and '*the told*' which is about receiving the story and engaging in interpretation.

Reading aloud as part of a community of readers blends talking, storytelling and listening into a single activity, which according to Attenborough (2008:14) helps '*build the foundation for language development.*' Although this role is often assumed by adults and professionals working within specific contexts, there was evidence throughout my time in the setting that the more confident child readers were adept in supporting less confident children, encouraging reading through reading to them and helping them choose books. This means that the children participants engaged in storytelling throughout this project in two key forms: mediated and unmediated.

4.5.1 Children as Storytellers

Mediated storytelling using picturebooks, which featured in the participatory part of the research process, involved the children in recounting and retelling their favourite stories, reviving experiences,

and sharing feelings in their Scrapbooks and during the child conferencing process in ways wholly aligned to the *spirit* of reading. Child 4, for instance, shared and retold her favourite story with the group during one of these sessions. This story was mediated through the picturebook ‘*Little Rabbit Foo Foo*’ by Michael Rosen. This example is first mentioned in Section 4.2.1 regarding the notion of blended idea of literacy practices.



I hope you like my super writing

A monster book that's said my name and my name is.... and I readed lots of books like Little Rabbit Foo Foo and its said little rabbit Foo Foo rid into through the forest and down cam a good fairy and it said once upon a time in a tiny kingdom there was a man who was king and they had horble sisters and brother. The end.

Figure 60. child 4 (age 5) Original Scrapbook Entry and Transcribed Narrative

In this case, though, the focus is on Child 4's ability to extend and elaborate on the story by piecing it together with fragments of other stories. The story of *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* does, as her narrative says, involve a good fairy who offers the central character three chances to be good. Here, however, Child 4 conflates this contemporary picturebook with traces of fairy tales. So, although Child 4 was retelling a favourite tale based on fragmentary memories of the story structure and key characters, this activity also involved unmediated storytelling with her making elaborate and creative additions to the narrative arc. These bridge the concepts of mediated and unmediated storytelling, demonstrating that storytelling is far from a 'static narrative' (Clark, 2010:5). Child 4 can competently negotiate these ideas and create a new story linking to ideas of Woolf (2021:n.p.) who proposes the reader becomes a 'fellow worker and an accomplice' or in Meek's (1988:14) words the texts 'recruit' children's imagination and their understanding of reading literature. Child 4 was also active in developing the story further by using a traditional structure as implied by the use of 'The End.' This idea of structure also appears later in relation to the subtheme 'becoming an author' with the children choosing 'Once upon a time' as the opening sentence for the picturebook they created.

Another example of child as storyteller appeared in the accounts. In these cases, it is of the children participants talking about telling and reading stories to others. Child 15 exemplifies this when talking about how she reads stories to her sister, saying she does it when, *'When my mammy's downstairs and my little sister wants a story, she's 2.'* When I asked, 'does she love you to read to her?', she answered, *'Yes she likes Snow White.'* That this four-year-old sees reading to the two-year-old as part of her role in the reading community of the family, and connects it with stepping into her mother's role, shows an understanding of reading across generations. As she has been read to, so she will read to others, in a reciprocal act where reading is about care, attention and affection. The response reflects the ways in which favourite stories and/or characters can be shared within a family and become an integral part of children's reading histories and choices. It also suggests that traditional tales and fairy tales are an integral part of the fabric of their family reading interactions and reading practices. In general terms, such practices support children to develop a broader and more extensive repertoire of stories, so linking to the earlier discussion about reading for pleasure in the home environment (See Section 4.4.4).

4.5.2 Reading as Community

The next question, *who tells the best stories?* created quite a lot of discussion and there was a lot of debate with the children almost trying to come to a collective decision about who the best storyteller is, rather than an individual personal one. Here are some of the responses:

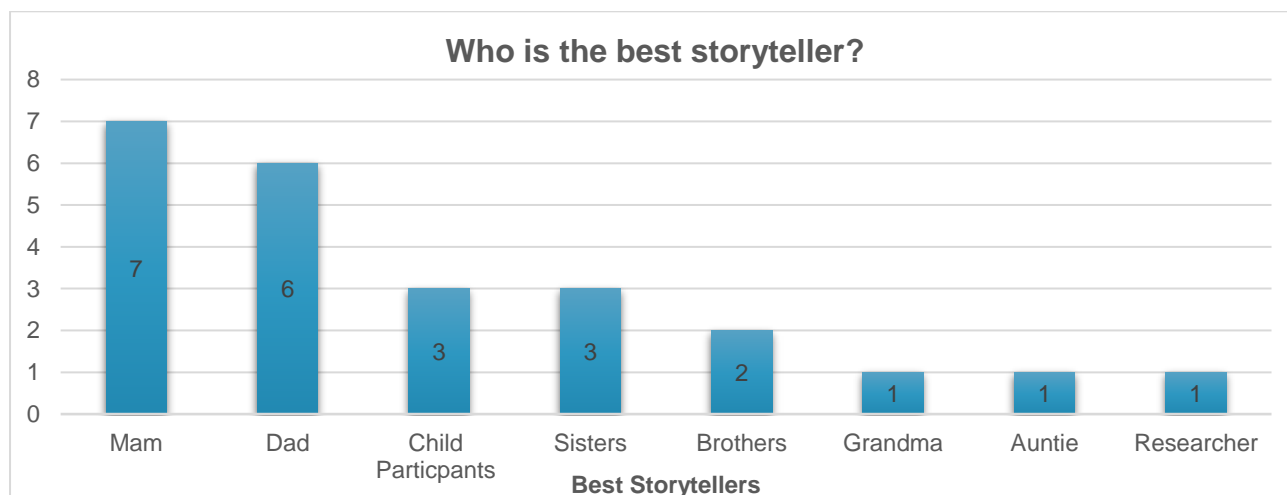


Figure 61. Storyteller Data

The responses to this question were quite varied, as Figure 61 shows. There was a mix of members of the family as the best storytellers, with three children suggesting they themselves tell and create the best stories. Broadly speaking parents tended to be considered the best storytellers. Some children gave a range of responses, for instance Child 1 replied; *'I love reedin with mammy. I love reedin in my hed*

in bed. I love macin up storees'. Child 8 also suggested they were good at telling stories *'I tell the best stories; I like to make them up. I like to read to everyone especially my mam and dad and Auntie.'*

Researcher Reflections and Observations

There was one anomaly in the data with Child 13 suggesting I was the best storyteller. This anomaly is easily explained, as prior to this child conferencing session I had a *'literacy event'* where I read aloud the picturebook Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury's *'We're going on a Bear Hunt.'* This book was listed as one of their favourites and as I have used this many times in other contexts, I own about 40 copies. So, although this event was not unusual and happened regularly, on this occasion I brought in enough copies of the book, so each child had their own copy. At the beginning the children followed the words with me and sang along with the rhythm of the book and the bits they knew. As the story continued the children started to go back and forth in the book talking to their friends and opening up discussions and sharing observations about family structure, in particular the presence or absence of a mother and how they will get home and towards the end there was an interesting discussion about whether the bear was dangerous or just wanted to be friends and whether the story was real or imaginary. The children were excited and chatted about the book long after we had finished reading. Giving each child a copy of the story to construct the reading space as open and dialogic with ownership of the story sitting firmly with them as co-authors. This event was obviously resonated with and was immediate for Child 13 when they suggested I was the best storyteller. However, as you might note later in the discussion Child 13 decided their mam and dad were the best storytellers after all!

What is perhaps most interesting here is the debate that emerged, which implied a form of connoisseurship regarding storytelling. These children felt that they were experts who could judge the skills and talents of others. They also saw themselves as skilled storytellers with the capacity to share narratives, modelling reading and storytelling to others just as they had been modelled to them. However, another encounter with a group consisting entirely of boys, different children to those featuring in Section 4.3.1, brought about reticent responses similar to the other group, and this indicated, I feel, their lack of confidence. Although there were 3 boys present only one, Child 17, really responded to the questions. I offer that child's account here to indicate how, even though he engaged with books with family as part of his reading community at home, and was immersed in story, his self-labelling was as a non-reader. This was also despite him showing visual literacy and storytelling skills, which he understood, but did not seem to value, as his comment about all stories being 'fake', i.e., made-up, suggests, before he extemporises a short story. The interview surfaces a tension around the nature of fiction, but also around the idea of reading identities. When I asked, 'So, tell me about

reading, who do you read with?' Child 17 responded '*Everybody in my whole family.*' I added, 'so, who's in your family?' Child 17 answered '*Uncle Jack, Uncle Dave, my mam.*' My next question was, 'and they tell you stories, what kind of stories do you like?' and Child 17 said '*I have funny books but I don't know what they are called.*' Upon enquiring, 'so do you like to read on your own?' Child 17 responds, '*no I don't know how to read.*' I commented, 'Not yet but you are learning. You can read stories through the pictures, you don't need words, can't you?' and Child 17 said, '*yeah. You make a story by just watching the pictures.*' I next asked 'who, in your family tells the best stories – do they make funny voices?' and Child 17 answered '*Yeah, well Jack tells fake stories... Well all stories are fake, all of them.*' Puzzled, I asked, 'What does that mean?' to which Child 17 responded, '*Stories are not real.*' To expand this I added, 'and do you make up stories yourself?' 'Yeah' said Child 17. 'Fake ones?' I asked, and got the response '*Yes, I'll tell you one. In the forest. All that happens is there's a skeleton and they throw bows and arrows*'

Some of these questions were designed to interrogate ideas of reading communities and who, if anyone, would be included, as Child 17's account demonstrates. The idea was to gain insights into their reading practices or rituals, but there was no mention of reading in school and the teaching professionals were not represented in the data. This could be because the children associate storytelling with home or familial relationships, or because they do not see the teachers' skills as comparable, or because so many of the reading activities involve larger groups, whilst the children seem to prefer the intimacy of reading with a small number of other people.

4.5.3 Practitioner Perspectives on Storytelling

The Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum emphasises the role of teachers as modelling and supporting children through conversation, storytelling, and role play, to share and develop their own ideas and stories, linking to the '*expressive arts and design*' dimension supporting children's '*children's artistic and cultural awareness supports their imagination and creativity*' (EYFS, 2021:8). Further the prime area of '*understanding the world*' emphasises that listening to stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems enables children get to grips with a diverse range of cultures, technologies, and ecologies. Teachers, therefore, play a key role, despite the absence of the teaching team from Section 4.5.2. This finding is also odd given the commitment made by the team to work in different ways with stories, including creating elements where the children became authors/'*scriptors*' (Barthes, 1977:145). This was particularly important in Teacher 2's long account of a major project that they had undertaken, which was intended to draw parents into their children's reading and

encourage them to be part of the reading community of the school, where this had not previously been the case. The mechanism was the creation of blank books by the teachers, where a story was devised by each child, written down by the teachers, then illustrated by the child, after which they were filmed reading their book. Afterwards the books and videos were shared in-school with the parents. The emphasis is on the way that these books engendered children's pride in their creation, but also pride in reading, being recorded, and celebrated. Teacher 2 said that practice had changed, as,

The school was just focused on guided reading and phonics but for a lot of children they weren't learning in the same way as what was being delivered, so we thought we could tailor it and look at the research and see what we could do. So, we did the story telling curriculum with them which is where they like we made them little books and they made a picture on the front and at they told us what was happening in the story, so we wrote them down, the end of the week we videoed recorded them reading their story and they were so, so proud of it. And obviously we give them key words within the phonics and things. But at the end of the weeks on a Friday we would invite in parents in to come and share stories and to take stories out of the library, watch their children reading their stories that they've created on the board and just really making it massively book focused in the hope that it would continue at home because the data was showing that those children who weren't being read to at home, for whatever reason weren't getting the grasp, the phonic.

They really liked it there was free tea and cake. There was quite a lot of parents that I didn't imagine would have stayed for long, you'd find them in the corner sharing a story with the children then their children got to pick a story to take home for the weekend.

The school said the head could see a difference cos we did an assessment of the children at the beginning and at the end and they said the children had improved and they said they were going to keep it up, it is quite time consuming. I've seen them when they were doing the story telling curriculum when they've created their own story and they just love it and it helps them because they know in their heads the story is and it helps them try and read and sound out the words and blend them and they recognized that language in their heads because it was language they used it wasn't us saying use this word, yes they will have had some of it modelled in the phonics earlier in the day but they didn't necessarily use that word, it didn't matter.

Aligned to the question I asked the children about storytelling and storytellers; I asked the teaching professionals if they could remember being told stories when they were younger. Teacher 1 said,

Emm, I remember reading like bedtime stories and things with my mam and dad and I remember that. And me and my brother used to love listening to tapes so adventure stories, when we got older. Emm but I used to love listening to adventure stories and I remember just reading with my mam and dad kind of doing it with them and my brother he's older than me so him reading with me as well that's kind of my memory of when I was little.

This suggests, that, as with the children, the family as reading community was significant. This discussion also includes listening to recorded stories, thus bringing in a different kind of medium, one which the children did not mention. Their accounts discussed 'live' storytelling exclusively.

All the responses to this question related to the home environment, or to other relatives and little was mentioned about school or reading with teachers or friends. In this sense the teacher's narratives replicated those of the children, where school was not associated with the pleasures of engaging with texts. This is despite the emphasis on story in the curriculum, as noted above.

The question also picked up on relationships with other members of the family, especially grandparents, and the reading practices that were encountered with them, creating a wider reading community, and showing reading as engaged with in a variety of ways. So, for example, Teacher 1 said,

No, I think I preferred to read with somebody and I remember going to my granda and grandma's house and they had a big cupboard and I would go and get a book out of it as soon as I got in my mam always said that if you go and get a book and sit with my grandad and read and that's what I used to do as soon as I went in.

With Teacher 1, as the account continues, a slightly different emphasis comes to the fore, as it was not just reading that was part of their activity, but book related behaviour more like aspects of librarianship, with labelling being important, so thinking about the book holistically, or as part of material culture. They said,

I think it was more grandparents' house I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house it's the house they are still in now and like I say they had a big tall cupboard and I used to make labels for all of the books you know with a label maker and put them on all the books and me and my grandad used to sit, he's still got the chair a really old wicker chair and we used to sit there

together and read. My mam said I used to do it every single time, go in and get the book and sit down'

This focus on connecting with others through reading, through the human experience of telling stories, reading communities, and recounting personal narratives also appeared in the parent/guardian/carer questionnaires, where Parent 1, for instance, emphasised, *'Reading Ladybird books with Mum.'* Another element, again thinking of the book as an object and thinking about reading and physicality, so, for instance, Parent 2's memories of early reading were of *'My dad reading to me and him letting me lick my finger to turn the page.'*

Finally, the teachers were also asked about the kinds of books they use within the classroom and whether their own reading history had an impact on the books they choose to use. Typically, it was a mixture of old and new. For example, Teacher 1 responded,

I think I use newer books, like The Gruffalo and things like from when I was little, emm, The Very Hungry Caterpillar was one I liked when I was younger. They love stories, they really do. Like they're always intrigued about different things and even if I put stories up on the board and things they're really interested.

4.5.4 Children as Storytellers

Both adults and children share stories about current events in the world around them, about events they have experienced personally and events that take place in their imagination (Cassell & Ryokai, 2001:170). Of course, these types of oral storytelling differ considerably from the activity of story reading (Daniel, 2007:736), and there is a dominant cultural construction that stories are to be read rather than simply heard, in line with educational practice. Both forms of storytelling, however, are rooted in making up stories and then sharing them, albeit through different mechanisms. So, when I asked the children in one child conference group, the one dominated by the educationally engaged girls, *'Does anyone make stories up?'* the response was a chorus of voices, with Children 5, 2, 1 and 4 all sharing their experiences. Child 5 for instance, said *'I make loads of stories up with my grandma'* and Child 2 stated that *'I made up a lot of poems when I was in nursery.'* Note also, in Section 4.5.2, Child 17 also said that they make up stories.

Throughout this thesis I have referred to the idea of children as authors. Firstly, in terms of authoring their own lived experiences of their reading journeys and memories, and in authoring their Scrapbook entries, making authorial decisions about what is included and excluded. Here I would like to introduce recently published research by Caralyn Blaisdell, Lynn J. McNair, Luke Addison and John M. Davis,

(2022:572) outlining Phase one of an action research project exploring how ‘*Learning Stories*’ were implemented in a nursery setting, focusing on children’s participatory rights and authorship. ‘*Learning Stories*’ is a form of narrative assessment that aims to capture ‘*children’s working theories and learning experiences*’ and is ‘*compatible with a democratic, participatory paradigm of documentation and assessment*’ (Blaisdell et al., 2022:573). Challenges in capturing children ‘*Learning Stories*’ were recorded in terms of the children rarely being involved in actual authoring of their ‘*Lived Stories*’ and in terms of children’s own authorship of the stories, ‘*practitioners acknowledged that it was rare to write a story directly with children*’ (Blaisdell et al., 2022:580). What is interesting for this research project is that the research team identified some significant barriers to children’s participation as authors, including material artefacts and resources such as the difficulty of typing the stories on nursery issued tablets, resulting in them being completed on home laptops. Other challenges and pressures were noted, such as the time and concentration necessary to write a ‘*Lived Story*,’ the constant working pressures in practice, confidence in writing, limited technology, and access to Wi-Fi. Yet, despite these challenges, the practitioners managed to engage some children in authoring via video and written narratives. The children were not purposefully excluded from authorship, rather the ‘*realisation (or lack thereof) of children’s Article 12 participation rights as authors was deeply entangled with the power dynamics of working life and the material elements of the online system*’ (Blaisdell et al., 2022:580). These insightful research findings and conclusions are helpful for this thesis as they surface the many challenges practitioners may face when engaging with these types of activities. Although the focus of the research was slightly different, the ethos of participation and authorship were similar. On reflection, as a researcher rather than a practitioner, I did not have to contend with the same work-related pressures in terms of institutional expectations and technological issues encountered in this research project. However, time was a considerable challenge as the children had many curriculum related activities to complete. Therefore, time was a constraint although it was the children participants time that was in short supply rather than mine,

The following section outlines and explores the children participants experience of being and becoming authors. Teacher 2’s account in Section 4.5.3 shows part of the children’s pre-existing experiences within school, but here I worked alongside the children to enable them to experience and discuss the role of an author as well as the authorial, illustrative, and publishing decisions that authors make. This theme is directly linked to the previous discussion about storytelling and the children’s ability to retell traditional stories or to create their own narratives.

I am mindful that in Section 2.3., I flagged up Barthes' (1973:3) concepts of *'author'* and *'scriptor'*, which were discussed in terms of creators of texts. I'm also conscious that I use the term author when talking about the children's activities throughout this thesis. This usage is because of the cultural dominance of the term author in everyday life and because of the children's familiarity with it. However, in academic context, the reconceptualising of terms by Barthes (1974:3) is important to this thesis as the term *'scriptor,'* more readily echoes the role of someone who, like the children, combine texts they know in new ways drawing on previous *'texts, norms and conventions.'* These ideas resonate particularly well with this *'literacy event'* (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8).

4.5.5 Becoming an *'Author'*

During conversations with the children participants about authorship, I realised that the topic could offer an opportunity to address the issues I had encountered in attempting to achieve all five of Shier's (2001) levels of participation with the children in the second phase of the research project (See Figure 4). After further discussion with the children, we collectively decided to become authors by creating a picturebook. Developing this picturebook with all thirty-nine children was not just about the children tailoring existing books to their own preferences. Sheir's model was utilised to ensure the children's full participation. The children decided upon all aspects of the story and even established different working groups or teams dedicated to writing, editing and photography.

These groups honed the ideas and structured the process. Each team consisted of a mix of girls and boys. The process of authoring the book evolved through several phases, as outlined in Figure 62.

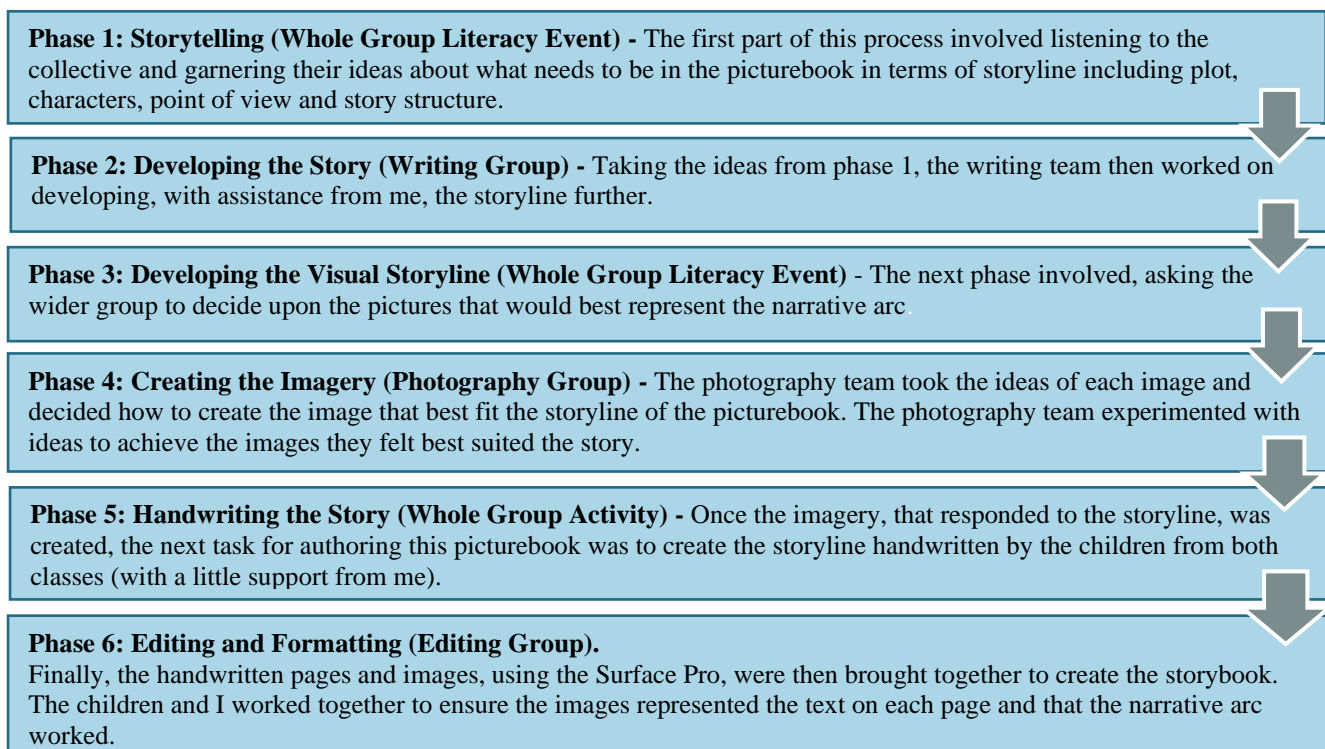


Figure 62. Authoring Framework

Phase 1: Storytelling - Whole Group Literacy Event.

The first part of this endeavour involved listening to the children working as a collective and garnering their ideas around the picturebook storyline including plot, characters, point of view and story structure. This aspect of construction was predicated on community making and listening carefully and tuning into the children’s *‘culture of communication’* (Christensen & James, 2017:2) thus achieving the first three levels of Shier’s (2001) model. Here are some of the early suggestions the children made in discussion regarding developing the storyline. Child 1, for instance, thought that the main character would be *‘going to do keep fit,’* whilst Child 2 suggested *‘he does yoga and eats porridge.’* Child 5 said *‘he’s not naughty,’* and Child 14 offered *‘he goes to the pigs and pretends that he is hiding from the pigs & plays in the playground.’* Further, Child 5 suggested *‘I think he might build a tower – in here with cushions – not the building blocks or he’ll be the garden with lots of butterflies.’* All ideas were considered by the whole group and the most popular aspects were decided upon and further developed in Phase 2 by the writing team.

Phase 2: Developing the Story - Writing Group

Taking these ideas, the writing team, consisting of mostly children from the reception class, then worked on developing the storyline further. The discussions had in the working group when developing the narrative arc further foregrounded the central character, who, it was established, was an

anthropomorphic bear. A suitable toy bear was selected, and named Beanstalk, another fairy and folk tale reference, and it was decided that the setting for the narrative would be the school itself. The initial plot was summarised by Child 4 and Child 5 as, *'He visits the school, and he sits down and rites a story and goes to sleep. He snores and snores.'*

Phase 3: Developing the Visual Storyline - Whole Group Literacy Event

Following Phases 1 and 2, the second whole group consultation was arranged to finalise and agree aspects of the storyline completed by the writing team. The overall narrative was eventually decided to be about the bear searching for the children around the school and being directed and helped by some of the beings he met as he travelled around the setting. The next decisions to be made were about which visual representations that best fit the narrative arc. The children were asked to draw a picture of Beanstalk the bear, whilst also considering what pictures best represented this protagonist at the heart of the story.



Figure 63. Child 5 (age 5) Image for Storybook



Figure 64. Child 14 (age 5) Image for Storybook



Figure 65. Child 4 (age 5) Image for Storybook

Each part of the storyline needed an image to exemplify the point of the story. The image ideas were decided upon by the whole group before referring the image outlines and story to the photography team in Phase 4.

Phase 4: Creating the Imagery - Photography Group

The photography team, which consisted mostly of nursery class children, took the suggested ideas about each image and decided how to create the best fit with the storyline of the picturebook. Setting up the images did take a considerable amount of time, in terms of considering each photograph's location and creating the composition of the image. For instance, taking a picture of the bear talking to live hens and pigs was quite difficult, not only in attempting to make the soft toy bear stand up when he had no structure (achieved using a water bottle and an elastic band) but also waiting for the hens and pigs to move towards the bear to capture the image (in the image below you can see the blue water bottle). The children took many different photographs to check which ones worked best, for instance by changing perspective to a bird's-eye view or taking an image from below. The photography team experimented with ideas to achieve the images they felt suited the story.

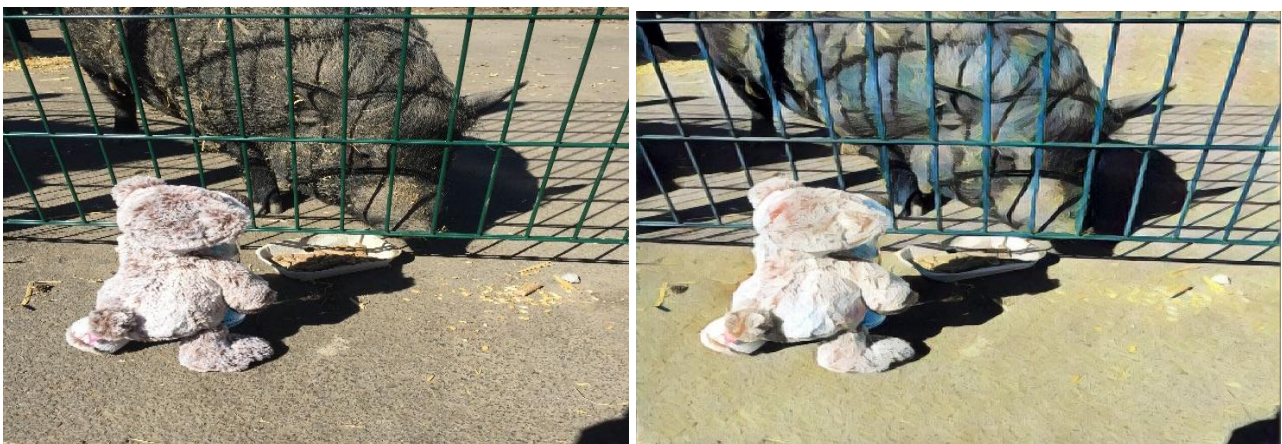


Figure 66. Original Photograph & Prisma Version



Figure 67. Original Photograph & Prisma Version

Having created the photographic imagery, we collectively decided that the photographs would be better as artwork. I researched which photo editing apps might be appropriate to use to design the artwork based on the photographs and took what I had found out to the photography team. They deemed *Prisma* the most suitable, so making authorial decisions with regards the tone and aesthetic of the images (see the ‘before and after’ images in Figures 66 and 67).

Phase 5: Handwriting the Story (Whole Group Activity)

Once the imagery was created that responded to the storyline, the next task was to write the storyline up. It was decided that it would be handwritten by the children from both classes (with a little support from me). Using the handwriting feature on a Surface Pro each child wrote/mark-made a part of the story. Once the full story was completed, we used Adobe Illustrator to condense and format the finished pages, see example below. This short piece of handwriting would have been completed by a number of children, in some cases contributing one letter, which would be on a full page that needed to be condensed and formatted, to achieve the format in Figure 68.

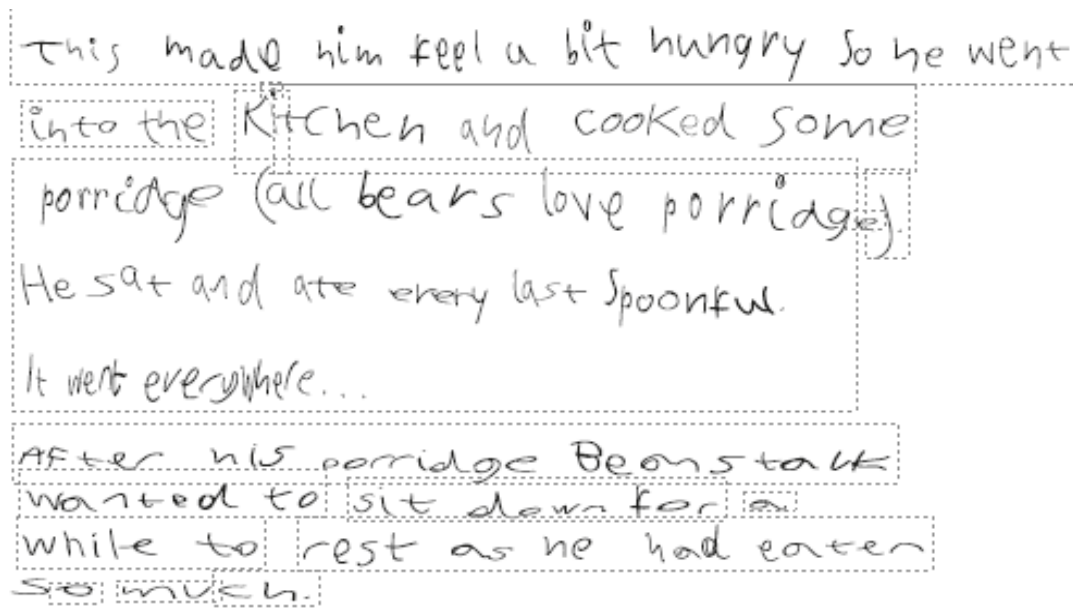


Figure 68. Example of Children's Handwriting

Phase 6: Editing and Formatting - Editing Group

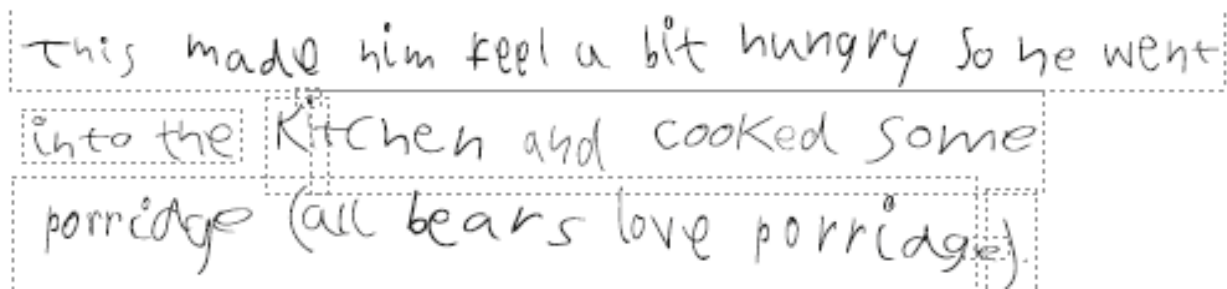
Finally, the handwritten pages and images were then brought together to create the storybook using the Surface Pro. The children and I worked together to ensure the images represented the text on each page and that the narrative arc worked.

4.5.6 Reflections on the Process

When the picturebook was completed, I asked the children what they now thought an author was, and what they enjoyed about being an author. When I asked, 'What do you think an author is?' Child 14 responded, '*Somebody who writes a book*' and when I followed up by asking 'And what do you think it feel like to be an author?' Child 5 said '*They're famous*' and Child 14 offered a more complex response saying, '*well, it's when you have written a book, but you need to have more than two to be a proper author*' and Child 5 adds '*It's just someone who makes up stories.*' Interestingly, when I asked the teachers if they talked about authorship, it became apparent that it was not a major topic, so the children's understandings were unlikely to come from the classroom setting, for as Teacher 1 said, '*Not much but I think that is something I could do.*' When I asked the children how they felt about the experience and whether they had liked it Child 8 said they had, stating '*Yeah, taking all the pictures*' and added that they had also liked the writing, as had Child 5. Finally, when I asked what it felt like to be an author, Child 14 responded succinctly, '*Good.*'

Whilst the story changed considerably through the different phases the bear remained, thus tying back in with comments about the popularity of books with anthropomorphic elements in earlier in thesis.

Further anthropomorphic elements included other animals assisting the bear in his quest to find the children. As the story unfolds what is interesting is that there are many elements that resonate with the research themes discussed in this chapter. For instance, aspects of the story reflect their love of, and make the most of their knowledge of, fairy tales, as indicated by the opening line, 'Once upon a time.' There was also reference made to traditional tales and fairy tales in that the favourite books of the bear included *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, which was later referenced in the text when suggesting,



This made him feel a bit hungry so he went into the kitchen and cooked some porridge (all bears love porridge).

Figure 69. Example of Children's Intertextual Knowledge

The bear's favourite books that he read during the story reflected those highlighted by the children as favourites in Theme 1 (See Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3), including *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen & Oxenbury, 1989), *Can't You Sleep Little Bear* (Waddell & Firth, 1988), *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins, 1968) and *The Jolly Postman* (Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 1986). The children chose the books carefully as they informed the basis of the plot given that they were essential items used by the bear to decide what to do next. This idea resonated with the children's love of books and the value they placed on storytelling as a way of thinking through and making sense of the world (Daly, 2021). This use of texts and key elements of familiar stories reflected the children's intertextual links and knowledge (Sipe, 2000) (See Section 4.2.4). The children purposely included *Rosie's Walk* as Rosie is, from their perspective, a clever hen who would be able to offer the bear advice. They also chose *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* as this involved a voyage to find someone or something which would help the bear move forward and ask questions. They also included, towards the end of the bear's search, *Can't You Sleep Little Bear*, demonstrating their empathic reading of the bear's situation. All these books were, in effect, 'old friends in new places' (Meek, 1988:22). To summarise, this picturebook is a literary patchwork that represents complex understandings of how texts work, reflecting the children's experiences of reading (Hoffman, 2010). These experiences were utilised as a device to help the protagonist navigate his way through the story.

This discussion reflects the genuine interest these children have as a community of storytellers who assimilate what is read with what they already know (Oatley, 2003:166). This literacy event was

predicated on conversations or *'talking for pleasure'* (Parry & Taylor, 2018:103) about or around texts which were significant to the children in terms of retelling, elaborating, or developing and making up stories. This relationship between *'reading, writing and talking for pleasure'* (Parry & Taylor, 2018:103) can be summarised as *'braids of literacy'* (See Section 4.2.1) which are woven together (Wolf & Brice-Heath, 1992) where each inform the understanding of the others (Parry & Taylor, 2018).

The children's propensity to create stories both oral and written was genuinely inspiring. Their attention to detail in terms of the creation of all aspects of the story and imagery was exceptional and their understanding of how stories work was demonstrated to be complex. Their distinctive voices and sharp insights, as shown in other aspects of this research, also fuelled the creativity and energy which emanates through this story and reflects the *'story telling curriculum,'* described earlier by Teacher 2. Working alongside the children in this way enabled them to experience and discuss the authorial, illustrative, and publishing decisions they were making, as well as allowing us to further share memories and prior experiences of reading.

4.6 Chapter Summary: The *Spirit* and the *Letter* of Reading

What is clear from the discussions and activities is that the children participants could clearly articulate their own personal choices in terms of the books that they chose to read and decided to share. Children bring powerful resources to the classroom, according to Schmidt (2018), who argues that it is crucial to recognise and value them within education. In terms of these resources the children were able, and keen, to construct and determine (James & Prout, 1997) their own reading choices, rather than being the passive subjects of social structures and reading processes (James & Prout, 1997). These sophisticated choices are aligned to Mills' (2003:21) construction of childhood *'as persons in their own right.'* This idea refers to the individuality of each child participant as having *'unique, individual features, stressing personal, integrity'* (Mills, 2003:21). This view of childhood means that the children are positioned as people now rather than being perceived as not yet people or seen as in deficit. The children were able and willing to make decisions, express opinions and make explicit their everyday experiences and choices (Bruner 2006:176) as is evident throughout the chapter. These ideas are associated specifically to a rights-based discourse aligned to the UNCRC (1989) Article 12 *'respect for the views of the child.'* I would argue that their opinions, choices, and experiences could have remained overlooked given the dominant discourse that their views are *'routinely considered as unremarkable'* (Horton & Kraftl, 2006:71) but in this research they are valued and shown to be remarkable, relevant, significant, and insightful. Further, Pennac's (2006:145) contention that a reader

has the '*right to read anything*' they desire, is a reminder that reading should be about autonomy and choice, or, as Cremin puts it, reading '*of their own free will*' (2014:12).

As has been shown above the children participants chose texts they saw as interesting and personally engaging, as reflected in their Scrapbook entries and child conferencing discussions. This model of participation and choice is aligned to Cremin's, (2011:3) '*Wider Reading Agenda*' which is child centred in that it is about children taking ownership of reading and books. This agenda aligns succinctly to the core principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (2021:6) that states, '*every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.*' As noted earlier, this can be seen as in tension with aspects of the delivery of the EYFS and the testing regime, but here the uniqueness is evident in the choices the children make. The teaching professionals, within the context of this classroom, appeared to have a wide knowledge of children's literature, although this varied from individual to individual, and through their discussions recognise the advantages of exploring a wider range of texts, whilst taking '*risks with their choice*' (Cremin, 2011:3). However, the Classroom Book Collection (See Section 4.0.5), when compared to the Scrapbook entries and the children's discussions about their favourite books and individual preferences, did not necessarily reflect the reading choices of the children participants or indeed '*match their tastes*' (Worthy et al., 1999:12). Although teaching professionals are able to introduce interesting and exciting texts within their teaching, as Cremin (2011:6) points out '*time, space resources, knowledge of young people's preferences of literature and other texts as well as strategies to involve parents and caregivers often constrain practice and create challenges for the profession.*' This can have an impact upon providing a range of resources within the classroom that reflect individual preferences and act as children's '*mirrors and windows*' (Bishop, 1990:1), by offering the children a wider set of '*literacy resources through which to represent themselves*' (Schmidt, 2018:14). What this chapter shows is the challenge for the teaching profession in achieving and maintaining a subtle balance between the responsibility to teach reading/literacy appreciation (*the letter*) and to supporting children's love of reading (*the spirit*,) to, as stated earlier, '*foster both the skill and the will to read*' (Cremin, 2011:3).

To conclude, this chapter reflects the genuine interest in books these children have as a community of storytellers and readers, in part through sharing memories and prior experiences of reading. The discussions about reading spaces, and communities of reading sharing spaces, reflects the children's propensity to read, tell and create stories, both oral and written, as individuals and as a group. The attention to detail in all aspects of the creation of the picturebook showed the children's understanding of how stories and images work together in the grammar of the picturebook. My working alongside

the children enabled all of us to experience and discuss texts, to talk about how to read literature, to think about designing reading spaces, and to create a picturebook. In doing this, and especially in the creation of the book, this research captures aspects of their storytelling and authorial, illustrative, and publishing abilities.

Chapter Five

A Compelling Tale: Contribution to Theory, Conclusions & Recommendations Overview

Chapter Five: A Compelling Tale

Educational research is important as it can inform and improve education practice and advance knowledge and gain understandings of fields of education. This project has offered unique insights into the children participants real, lived experiences of reading for pleasure and developing as readers. The following chapter is a fusion of the discussions charted in Chapter 4, drawing on the theoretical framework outlined in the Literature Review and insights from the conceptual framework that has shaped the design and direction of the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:13). This framework has been an iterative process that has remained fluid and flexible throughout, whilst ensuring research validity and rigour. Adopting a more holistic approach to the findings and discussions enabled me to consider the ways in which this project contributes to the existing body of knowledge in this area of enquiry. Implications for practice and research are also considered in this final chapter.

5.1 Summary of findings and responding to the research aims and objectives.

As outlined in the introduction, the '*architecture of this thesis*' (Trafford & Lesham, 2002:12), aims and objectives have been predicated on my own passion for exploring children's love of books and reading and my prioritising of working with children, teaching professionals and parents in meaningful ways to elicit and capture their personal narratives about reading. In particular, the central tenet of this project was to capture children's personal reading histories and their experiences of books and reading, in their own words, enabling me to see and come to know '*reading*' differently. To do this, the research has foregrounded the '*everydayness*' (Horton & Kraftl, 2006:71) of children's reading as significant and insightful, especially in illuminating children's understanding of their lived experiences, of their own reading journeys. Given this, to reiterate, the overall aims and objectives of this research project were;

- To work with children in meaningful ways to capture their individual narratives with regards their reading experiences and histories in nursery and primary reception education and at home, to inform educational practices.
- To use both an ethnographic approach (phase one) and a creative participatory Mosaic approach (phase two) incorporating Scrapbooks and other creative research methods as stimuli or prompts to capture aspects of children's reading experiences through child conferencing (Clark & Moss, 2015).
- To work with teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians to capture their individual experiences of reading and to capture their reading histories as younger people.

- To produce high quality research that offers insights into the ways in which children, teaching professionals and parents/carers/guardians engage with the love of books and reading.

Whilst understandings of literacy policy, literacy pedagogy and literacy conceptions developed by researchers and policymakers are well documented, children's voices and their everyday experiences about what they read and who they read with is seldom sought, and therefore remains largely untapped, and frequently absent, from research and policy (Cole, 2008; Christensen & James, 2017). In response to this tendency, this research project adopted an emic approach with the children, encouraging them to share their perspectives about how they experienced reading, so enabling their voices to be heard, understood and, most of all, appreciated. As discussed throughout, the lens that each child views the world through is completely unique to them, so the research focused on asking questions about the what, who and where of reading for these children, both now and in the past. The resultant discussions surfaced a love of reading, but also an awareness of the different kinds of reading they had and were encountering, where other emotions, such as anxiety, appeared. All the same, the emotional dimension of reading for pleasure proved central in discussion with the children participants, teaching professionals and parents/guardians/carers.

The title of this chapter was carefully chosen as it reflects the overarching and recurring theme of storytelling that transcends the whole thesis. To this end I would like to propose that the entirety of this research project is a braid of storytelling woven together to tell a narrative that responds to and addresses the research aims and objectives outlined above. The theme of storytelling not only forms a considerable part of the data collection process and subsequent research findings (See Figure 14) but is the essence and ethos of the research agenda itself. In its totality this thesis is a narrative about reading, composed of observations and the stories and voices of a specific group of children, practitioners, and parents/carers/guardians in a particular location. To this end, these children told stories offering powerful accounts and insights into their lived experiences and the everydayness of navigating the complexities of multiple spaces, revealing their propensity to understand the complex ways in which texts and spaces work. That is not to exclude my own story from this tale, which is enmeshed both explicitly and implicitly, in terms of my positionality in the research conceptual and theoretical framework. I hope what is apparent, from the following discussion, is my own positionality in terms of the *spirit* and *letter* (Marshall & Drummond, 2007) of reading and my desire to research in meaningful ways.

In the introduction I outlined how the work of Margaret Meek, Aidan Chambers and Roland Barthes had a significant influence on my own understanding and thinking about reading and helped determine the study focus and conceptual and theoretical frameworks. As the thesis has progressed these academics were joined by a wealth of inspiring and trusted academics and practitioners who have been instrumental in assisting me to make sense and interpret this complex tale. The work of Teresa Cremin and her colleagues in their research for UKLA has been particularly significant to this thesis.

The theoretical framework for this project involved four distinct but complementary disciplinary domains: Children's Literature, Education, Childhood Studies, and Children's Geographies. These were fundamental to the project in terms of professional practice, theoretical understanding, and research agendas. This research project, focused on the traditions of children's rights and the sociology of childhood which overlap within these disciplines, especially via the specific focus on children as agentic and constructing their own worlds (Lipponen et al., 2015).

The methodological approach was aligned to these theoretical concepts and accordingly I adopted an interpretivist paradigm using an ethnographic technique in a bid to document '*the children's participation in the discourse of their own childhoods*' (Sanchez-Eppler, 2011:36). I used a Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2015) to gather data via researcher observation and later employed participatory methods including scrapbooking, child conferencing, individual interviews, literacy events, object elicitation, storytelling. These research methods were designed to allow the children to find their own level of response and to have the autonomy to decide what information they were prepared to share (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008). The overall methodological framework was designed to respond to Christensen and James' (2017:4) assertion that historically research has been '*on*', rather than '*with*', children, in an approach where adult caretakers speak for children.

Further, *The Children's Stories* chapter summarised the finding and discussions after the piecing together of data emerging from observation and the participatory research methods. This piecing together was challenging in terms of disaggregating individual themes (discussed in Section 4.0). Eventually the themes were divided into three sections (See Figure 70).

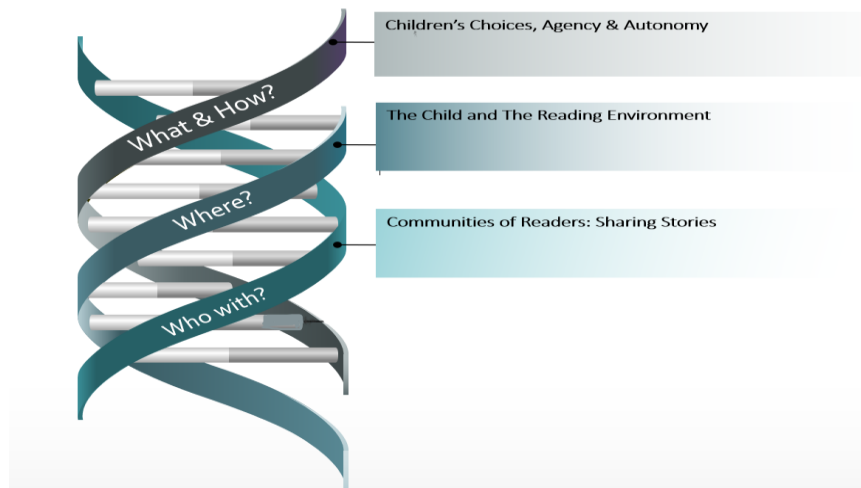


Figure 70. Research Themes

As discussed earlier, these sections were further divided into 5 main themes and subsequently into subthemes, as outlined in Figure 70, including ‘*much-loved books: reading choices,*’ ‘*the power of the page: discourses of reading,*’ ‘*schooling literacy: the ‘letter of reading,*’ ‘*the child & the environment*’ and ‘*communities of readers: sharing stories.*’ These themes were derived predominantly from the views, attitudes and beliefs of the children participants about literal and metaphorical reading spaces, although I also explored, to a lesser extent, the views of teaching professionals and parents/guardians/carers perspectives.

Research Findings: The Children’s Stories (...and some from adults)

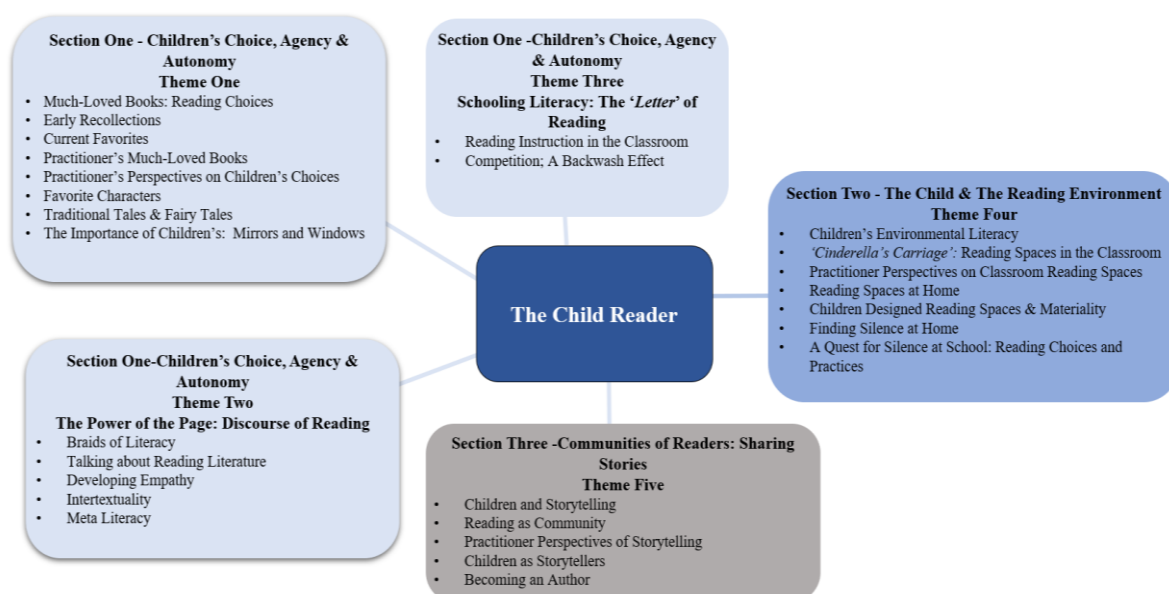


Figure 71. The Children's Stories (...and some from adults)

Whilst these sections, themes, and subthemes needed to be disaggregated, organised, and defined into specific categories for the purpose of analysis, this felt rather linear, as these themes and subthemes were intrinsically interconnected and blurred. This final chapter, therefore, draws together some conclusions to explain the complexity of the findings and to create a second framework that is helpful in trying to understand why this is important.

Throughout this research, I have searched for an idea or metaphor that I feel effectively illustrates the complexity of the concepts, thoughts and reflections that have been instrumental in developing this framework. Eventually, I settled on *pentimento* which I feel best explains some of the complexity I found. In this I was inspired by the use of the term (employed more commonly in discussing paintings) in Lillian Hellman's (1973) autobiographical work *Pentimento*. In Hellman's work, this idea of layering and transparency it is used to think through her memories of the people each of the chapters describe, in an attempt to also understand her youthful assessments of them. She defines the term in the introduction, saying,

Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called pentimento, because the painter 'repented,' changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again... The paint has aged now, and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now (Hellman, 1973:3).

This idea is valuable for this final chapter in two ways. Firstly, and most importantly, *pentimento* can be understood as a way of getting under the surface features of reading practices, those that are visible, to explore the complexities that lie beneath and are typically disguised. I would argue that the complexities include previous and current reader identities that are usually invisible just as the older layers of paint are on a canvas. I would like to argue, therefore, just as a painter develops, changes, and remasters a work of art, and time then reveals those changes, that these children are constantly developing their reader identities by reconfiguring, disrupting, and challenging ideas about reading, reading for pleasure, and the reading practices at home and in school. In this research these identities are shown to change, with older elements becoming visible even as new ones are added, both over the life period the children talk about, but also during the time I spent with them in this research.

Secondly, I would like to apply this idea to the research agenda and process itself. From inception this research project has changed and evolved with ‘*old conceptions*’ being replaced by ‘*later choices*’ but also incorporating reflection enabling me to experience seeing again. An example of this occurred in relation to my original assertion that as a researcher, I was less interested in how reading is taught in schools and the more functional aspects of reading, than in the emotional responses reading creates in younger children, the spaces where reading takes place and their engagement with books in their everyday lives. However, I felt it needful to refer to functional aspects of reading in the Literature Review in terms of the context of reading and the competing reading agendas. They further surfaced in the discussions and findings as the key emergent theme ‘*schooling literacy: the ‘letter of reading,’*’ and have subsequently been included as part of the conceptual framework, presented in figure 72. They became visible in a different way and seen anew.

Similarly, whilst the original perception of the role of the Scrapbooks was that they would act as catalysts for discussions, as the research progressed the Scrapbooks took on a life of their own, documenting change and becoming works of art in their own right, creating, in turn, an increasing interest amongst the children about what it means to be authors/‘*scriptors*’ (Barthes, 1974:3). This was combined with my concerns about participation, which I also reflected upon during the process and deemed as lacking in terms of children’s involvement in decision making and responsibility. Consequently, a mini project emerged to address issues of full participation, which moved still further away from my first phase of ethnographic observation. This mini project became an important part of the research process further demonstrating the children’s capabilities and imagination and fulfilled the upper levels of children’s participation outlined by Shier (2001).

Thus, from my perspective, this research project has been about discovery and has challenged my own taken-for-granted assumptions, whilst enabling me to see not only the visible attributes of reading practices, but also elements below the surface, offering new and valuable insights to the complex phenomenon of reading (Mac Naughton et al., 2010).

5.2 The Reading Spaces Framework

This Reading Spaces framework is an original contribution to theory that illustrates the complex multivalent reading environments children operate within. Developed from the findings that highlighted the children participants' experiences, the framework comprises of six key kinds of spaces, categorised as textual, imaginative, emotional, functional, metacognitive, and physical. Each space highlights key elements identified as significant in the research findings.

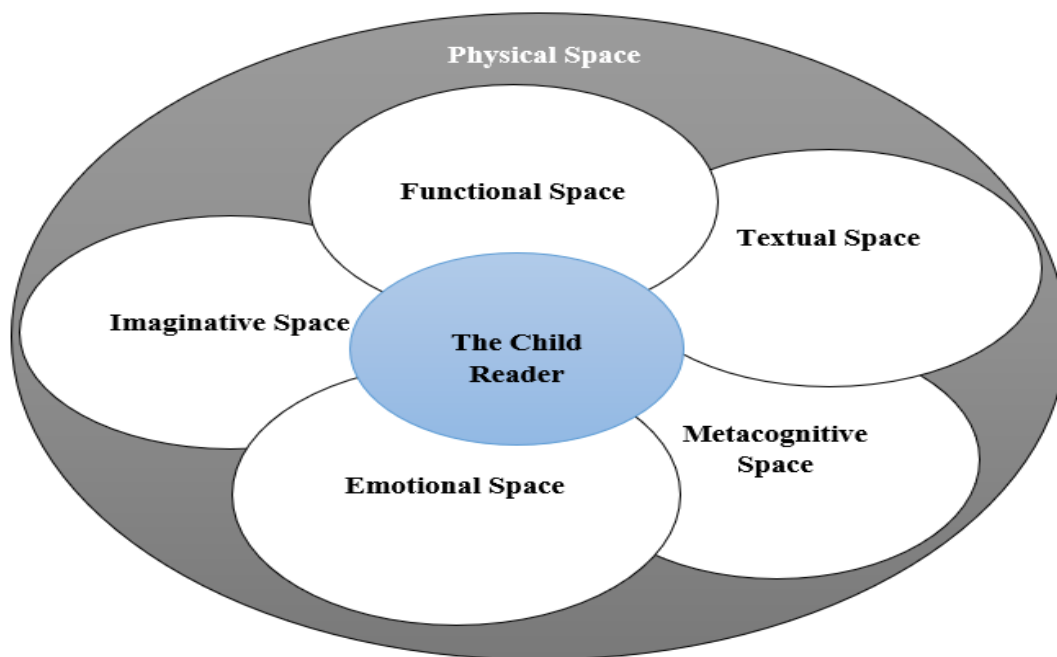


Figure 72. Reading Spaces Framework

The themes that emerged through this research study, confirm for me, that listening and hearing children's voices is a fundamental priority when considering reading spaces and environments. As previously discussed, reading environments are complex to define and somewhat problematic to explain. This framework attempts to indicate the differing spaces discovered through this research, that are significant to the creation of a positive reading environment. Within each space key factors have been identified that were indicated as significant by the research findings and deemed, for the most part, as valuable in terms of creating spaces that encourage and engage children in reading for pleasure.

Participation is central to the construction of the framework and useful as a measure of '*presence*' in terms of children's '*voice, contribution and agency*' in their many relationships (Moosa-Mitha, 2005:381). However, Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha (2005:381) goes on to suggest that '*it is not enough to*

have a voice; it is equally important to also be heard in order for one to have a presence in society.' This emphasises my role as someone who actively listened to what the children said and acted upon it in creating this research and also the framework's centring of the child rather than marginalising them. It is this presence of the child in determining the spaces highlighted in the reading environment framework that is important in terms of participating in the creation and maintenance of supportive and positive reading environments.

To support these ideas about participation I turn once again to Shier (See Figure 4). Shier's concept aligns with this reading framework because it speaks directly to those who are able to make changes. Shier (2001:110) outline five levels of participation in terms of '*openings,*' '*opportunities*' and '*obligations*' (See Figure 5). '*Openings*' (Shier, 2001:110) are described as individuals being ready and open to listen to children voices with regards the reading framework, ranging from level 1 '*are you ready to listen to children?*' to level 5 '*are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?*' '*Opportunities*' (Shier, 2001:110) refers to ways of working that enables adults to listen to children's voices in terms of their lived experiences of reading. Here the questions range from level 1, which questions whether '*you work in a way that enables you to listen to children*' through the levels that question and help surface processes and procedures that would enable children to express their views and join in decision making processes, eventually arriving at level 5 which asks, '*is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?*' Finally, '*obligations*' (Shier, 2001:110) is much more about policy and governance and moves from level 1, which asks, '*is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?*' to level 5 where it is asked '*is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?*' Shier's requirements are often omitted from policy except, for instance, in the UNCRC (See Section 2.2.3) and in the references made to voice and autonomy in curriculum documents and pedagogic frameworks. The model regarding participation emphasizes the need to move towards power sharing and begins with listening, something implied in the structure of the reading framework, which also indicates key factors for discussion. In effective participation it needs to be acknowledged that children view the world with different eyes and often have different priorities and concerns to adults. This too emphasises effective listening (See Section 2.2.6) to ensure adults hear '*children guiding us into their worlds*' (Kellett, 2011:1). Therefore, really listening and hearing in researching with children is predicated on notion of professionals tuning into the unique worlds and perspectives of children and them being active and engaged in the process.

In the next sections, these six reading spaces will be explored individually, however the spaces are inextricably linked and blurred and therefore to understand the framework, a holistic approach is needed rather than thinking of it as atomistic parts and extracts. Each space is explicitly linked to discussions already explored in specific themes in the findings chapter, thus creating a collage of ideas that helps us to better understand children's unique perspectives of reading and adding a piece to the mosaic of children's reading. Prior to exploring the reading spaces that are included in the framework, I would like to point out that this project would fall short if I merely suggested that the children participants navigate these reading spaces on an individual level one at a time. Instead, I would like to argue, through the following discussion, that the children participants not only change and manipulate the spatial and conceptual boundaries that reading inhabits within the two specific contexts but also confidently navigate, blur and renegotiate all the spaces simultaneously.

5.3 Physical Reading Spaces: The Outer Circle

To begin, I focus on the physical reading spaces discussed in Theme 2 '*The Child and the Reading Environment*' (See Section 4.4). The outer circle represents the physical reading space and includes some essential constituents of the '*art and the science*' (Roskos & Neuman, 2011:110) of creating any reading environment. During this research the children participants demonstrated their capacity to clearly articulate their views and experiences of physical reading spaces created for them and by them, thus demonstrating their '*environmental literacy*' (Clark, 2010:120). In addition to talking about physical space, they also talked about tangible objects and material culture that was important, in their view, in creating useable reading spaces within '*place*' defined as the surroundings, either at home or school, that supports and/or enables reading (Chambers, 2011:19).

The research identified the children's love of reading at home and their ability to exercise choice and autonomy when constructing their own bespoke reading spaces within their homes, particularly in the living room and their bedrooms. Their autonomy and participation, for me, correlates with ideas of children authoring reading spaces and making choices about the materiality and artefacts necessary to furnish these unique spaces such as cushions, fairy lights, tent-like structures or dens and, of course, their books. What echoed throughout these discussions was the children participants' focus on engaging with and creating spaces that deliberately and consciously were designed to afford them privacy and quiet. Whilst the children suggested that it was important to use physical spaces as community spaces for telling and listening to stories and spending time with parents and family, there was also a need to create reading spaces beyond parental, family or professional supervision, to have

ownership of not only how the space was designed but also who was permitted to use the space, as well as control over what was read and when.

The reading space within the educational context, mentioned continuously, was *Cinderella's Carriage* which was deemed as a creative and positive reading space in the research by the children, unlike the nursery reading space. Here too, although not child-created, the idea of a bespoke space like a den was important to at least some of the children. Some of the elements it contained reflected the spaces the children created and valued at home. As mentioned, it also acted as a point of tension in terms of gender, suggesting the need for more, and varied, spaces containing different artefacts and materials. This has implications for the architectural design of educational settings and the use of space in pre-existing buildings. In terms of professional engagement, it has become clear from the research findings and discussions that Teacher 1, who created *Cinderella's Carriage* for the reception class would be described by Cremin, (2011:5) as a '*Reading Teacher*' who shares their reading enthusiasm and their love of books and is cognisant of the importance of engaging and encouraging children in reading for pleasure (See Section 4.4.2). This teaching professional offered insightful understandings of what makes a positive physical reading space, had ideas about the reading collection, and was experienced in motivating the children to take ownership of their reading, reflected in the literacy events she initiated, as discussed earlier in Section 4.2.3. Teacher 1 reveals her '*set*' (Chambers, 2011:22) in relation to her mental and emotional attitudes towards reading which reflects her knowledge of books and experience in encouraging and engaging children in talking about literature.

As noted earlier, *Cinderella's Carriage* (See Section 4.4.2) was created and developed *for* the children rather than *with* the children. The different prepositions in this sentence reveal competing discourses of participation and tends to problematise adult/child status in terms of competency, power, and voice. Whilst the teaching professionals recognised the value, function, and role of listening to children's voices, there remained a disparity between this recognition and children participating in making decisions about their reading environment. Therefore, central to the development of positive reading environments is to ensure there is a participatory environment for children where they can express their views, exercise agency (Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021:141), and be listened to in terms of their *set* thus playing an active role in decision-making processes and sharing power (Shier, 2001).

Crucially, the locus of power often rests firmly with adults and participation and agency in this context is afforded or gifted by adults to children. To address this teaching professionals and family, need to

consider ‘*openings*,’ ‘*opportunities*’ and ‘*obligations*’ in terms of participation (Shier, 2001:110) and consider the differing ways agency and participation might be conceptualised (James & James, 2012). To this end, participatory and autonomous reading spaces need to emanate from choice and autonomy. To achieve this and to facilitate the inclusion of children’s voices in matters that concern them such as reading spaces, children need to be co-authors and co-participants in creating, designing, and negotiating the role and value of spaces (Clark, 2010).

5.4 Functional Spaces

Functional spaces are aligned to a certain extent with the textual spaces discussed later, in terms of the use of reading schemes for formal reading instruction that appeared in Theme 3 ‘*Schooling Literacy: The ‘Letter of Reading’*’ (See Section 4.3). These texts relate to performing at a specified or expected level within a measurement paradigm of reading. There are links between physical reading spaces, ideas about schooling literacy and learning the ‘*mechanics of reading*’ (Ender & Lynch, 2019:10), given that reading aloud with teachers in classroom spaces is commonplace. However, these literacy events often have no designated space within the classroom, but are opportunistic, taking place in whatever space is available at a given moment. This destabilises reading within the classroom space and so it is not entirely surprising that the children participants did not mention the spaces these activities they took place in. It was evident, however, that the children participants were cognisant, within the classroom, of this continuous formative assessment of reading comprehension, the rules, routines, and processes, all of which positioned them as readers of various abilities and contributed to their reader identities, although not necessarily in positive ways. In a sense, the classroom space was imbued with a sense of testing and of failure and success, which may also have contributed to the significance of Cinderella's Carriage as a safe reading space.

During the research the children participants demonstrated their agency through their competence and capability as social actors to manipulate and subvert these institutional rules with regards reading schemes and the associated processes. Their propensity to understand and articulate these complex processes militates against models and discourse of children as incompetent (James, 2007). However, as noted in Section 4.3.2, the ‘*backwash*’ (Hughes, 1998:1) effect of this paradigm of measurement and potential consequence of this testing culture initiated by a standards agenda, is, according to the research findings, create a culture of competition. This competition was acknowledged by the teaching professionals who also remembered this being the case when they were at school. Indeed, the competitiveness was the dominant memory or experience of the schemes rather than anything about the content of the books.

This resulted in much of the conversation with the children participants focusing on the qualitative judgements the children made about their own competency and ability as readers, referenced against the reading schemes and their peers. This competitive reading environment, aligned to the Standards Agenda, meant that some of the children participants saw themselves as incompetent or failed readers. This testing culture can not only undermine children's reading ability but also positions books as objects of knowledge that should only be read and understood in certain prescribed ways (Giroux, 1990:90). Here the metaphor *pentimento*, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is helpful in that children are judged and make judgements about themselves with reference to surface reading practices aligned to the Standards Agenda. Thus, functional reading spaces tend to prize visible reading practices and attainment that are measurable (Cremin, 2011) rendering reading a more mechanistic process, disguising the complexities that lie beneath. However, in discussion, those other layers became visible.

In this part of the research the only evidence of agency or autonomy was the children's ability to subvert and manipulate the rules and processes governing this functional space. Out of all the spaces outlined in the reading framework functional spaces are structured with high levels of processes and procedures as well as policy requirements. However, it is in this space, according to Harris (2015:27), that children's voices have been '*quite silent.*' Therefore, listening to how children feel about learning to read in these spaces and the use of reading schemes would be helpful in surfacing their attitudes and concerns, it not already implemented, about how they see themselves and construct their reader identities.

Children have limited opportunities to author this space, which is reflected in the data as the children participants did not mention the reading scheme books much except when I initiated questions about functional spaces, processes, and procedures. This surfaced discussions about competition, as noted, and the reading practices of taking their reading bags home and being '*made*' to read out loud, a phrasing that creates a sense of coercion and of making reading an unpleasant task, hence trying to undermine the process. As learning to read remains a high priority for most teaching professionals, who are cognisant of the challenges of striking a balance and achieving parity between the *letter* of reading (*functional spaces*) and the *spirit* of reading (*metacognitive, emotional, imaginative, and textual spaces*). Therefore, in terms of functional spaces it would be helpful, if not already initiated by teaching professionals, to consider Shier's (2001) '*openings,*' '*opportunities*' and '*obligations*' when talking to and with children about their experiences of these more functional aspects of reading.

5.5 Textual Spaces

Children need opportunities to engage with texts that are motivational and relevant to their childhood cultures. Textual spaces, therefore, in terms of the Reading Spaces Framework refer to the books themselves which were discussed in all themes but were more explicitly talked about in Theme 1 ‘*Children’s Choices, Agency & Autonomy*’ (See Section 4.1) and in Theme 2 ‘*The Power of the Page: Discourse of Reading*’ (See Section 4.2). The children participants talked about their current favourite books, later recorded in the Scrapbooks alongside some books from when they were younger. These latter texts are potentially amongst the children’s earliest memories of reading for pleasure. These choices included picturebooks, traditional stories and fairy tales. Earlier (See Section 4.1.2), I introduced the work of Bishop who advocates that books need to represent the multicultural nature of the world resulting in ‘*mirrors and windows*’ that represent children to themselves and introduce them to the worlds beyond their own (Bishop, 1990:1. Skinner, 2016). This too has implications for collection choices, but the key idea remains to start from children's preferences and extend from there.

Most of the texts the children referred would have been selected by the children themselves or by parents, grandparents etc., as part of their Home Book Collections, suggesting this level of participation in deciding which books to read was important in terms of inspiring and motivating the children to ‘*read of their own free will*’ (Cremin, 2014:12; Wallace, 2021). This means that understanding the reading preferences of the children in the classroom is essential if teaching professionals are to develop a classroom book collection that is meaningful. This idea is supported by Fisher and Frey (2018), who suggest that teaching professionals need to be cognisant of children’s preferences and create opportunities for children to express their ideas about books and make choices about which books they have access to, thus engaging them in reading for pleasure which will support them to become ‘*intrinsically motivated readers*’ (Fisher & Frey, 2018:91).

As with other aspects of this reading framework, this has implications in terms of time and in relation to teaching practices and achieving this can be challenging in terms of classroom collections, something suggested by the way that, at the time of this research, only 5% of the books recorded in the Classroom Book Collection reflected the books the children participants listed as their favourites. *The Reading Framework* (DfE, 2022) (See Section 4.1.8) makes a number of helpful suggestions about reading spaces and book collections, but, as already highlighted both in this study and that of Reedy and De Carvalho (2021), there is no mention of consultation with children about what books they love and

would like to read or what are they reading at the moment. Such questions would surface some interesting reflections about the children's reading preferences and providing these texts in classroom book collections would engage and encourage the children's reading habits.

Developing this motivation in the children is also reflected in the responses by Teacher 1 mentioned earlier, as a '*Reading Teacher*' (Cremin, 2011:5). Therefore, in terms of textual spaces it would be helpful for teaching professionals to consider '*openings*,' '*opportunities*' and '*obligations*' when choosing books for the classroom and incorporating out-of-school texts. What I am arguing, simply, is the reading materials in any Book Collection should be familiar and of personal interest to the children who occupy that space (Worthy et al., 1999).

5.6 Metacognitive Spaces

Metacognitive spaces within this framework are '*conceptual spaces*' linked explicitly to Theme 2 '*The Power of the Page: Discourse of Reading*' (see 4.2), as well as implicitly in many of the other themes. Literacy events throughout the research surfaced children's understanding of how texts work and how they read. The children proved to be sophisticated thinkers whose responses showed that they were not only able to understand but also eloquently share their experiences and expertise as competent readers.

Research by Styles and Arizpe (2001) has been incredibly helpful in identifying ideas of meta literacy. This research, mentioned in Theme 2, explored the multi-layered nature of Anthony Browne's (1992) *Zoo* and the sophisticated responses four- to eleven-year-old children brought to interpreting this text. The subtle and engaged analysis of visual texts reflected throughout this study, surfaced how the children participants perceived themselves as readers. This reading space is entirely predicated on the idea that skilfully created books encourage and engage children's imagination and creativity on multiple levels and are integral to reading for pleasure. Such texts are often informed by intertextuality, wilfully create a dissonance between image and word, and are aligned with constructs of the child reader as powerful, agentic, meaning makers. Such a view of the child reader means that children's books are created and designed to meet what are seen as demanding and critical readers. Therefore, an element integral to the metacognitive space in the framework, is about creating participatory reading environments where it is commonplace to explore ideas of meta literacy through literacy events (See Section 4.2.5). Of course, in doing so the quality of the books chosen for the event play a significant role in children's engagement, something which links directly to the discussion of textual spaces. Thus,

in terms of metacognitive spaces creating more opportunities or literacy events, which for many teaching professionals and parents this is commonplace, where younger children are encouraged to talk about books and share their competency and expertise in meta literacy and talking about literature with each other.

5.7 Emotional Spaces

Children's books can encourage and '*stimulate both intellectual and emotional experiences*' for children (Saracho & Spodek, 2010:401) with the emotional dimension when encountering emotional relationships and personal illuminations in their books. Of course, these emotional dimensions may engender negative emotional states too, as explored explicitly in Theme 1 '*Children's Choices, Agency & Autonomy*' (See Section 4.1), in Theme 2 '*The Power of the Page: Discourse of Reading*' (See Section 4.2) and in Theme 3 '*Schooling Literacy: The 'Letter of Reading*' (See Section 4.3), whilst also being alluded to implicitly in the other themes.

Emotional dimensions of reading are framed in this project in two distinctive ways. Firstly, this encompasses the ways the children participants feel about themselves as readers. This idea is reflected in most of the themes in terms of more positive emotions where children participants love the *Cinderella Carriage* reading space, talk happily about their favourite books, the fun of telling stories and reading with family, the love of creating their own reading spaces, the enthusiasm shown when talking about how literature works (meta literacy) and the accomplishment of becoming an author. However, during the research there were less positive emotional dimensions discussed about reading including lacking confidence, competitiveness and boastfulness in terms of reading schemes, and being judged against reading standards in both the education and home context, something appearing most prevalently in Theme 3 '*Schooling Literacy: The 'Letter of Reading*' (See Section 4.3).

The other emotional dimension centres around empathy. Books and stories, according to Daly (2021) support children to make sense of their worlds and the worlds around them and help them to tune into the feelings and emotions of others. Thus, reading teaches children empathy by requiring the reader to look at issues and challenges from other people's points of view (Bushnell, in Gill et al., 2021). However, rather than having to face the challenges featured in the text directly, the child reader can experience them from a safe distance and gain understanding by doing so. Of course, should they have experienced the issues the texts raise, it may be a positive experience in the sense of not feeling alone. Teaching children to be empathic towards others is an essential is a key human quality and literature

is according to Gill et al. (2021) one of the best ways to achieve this. Thus, in terms of emotional spaces it would be helpful, if not already initiated, for teaching professionals and parents to consider ‘*openings*,’ ‘*opportunities*’ and ‘*obligations*’ which would again take the form of literacy events where children demonstrate their expertise in sharing their books, telling stories, and authoring their own reading spaces and stories. These opportunities would be instrumental in developing the children’s competency and understanding as readers with a view to increasing confidence in reading.

5.8 Imaginative Spaces

Imaginative spaces transcend all the other spaces in the framework. For this project, the metacognitive spaces, mentioned in *discourses of reading* (See Section 4.2), illustrate the competency of the children participants in imaginatively deconstructing visual texts and co-authoring stories. Being involved with their creative storytelling and authoring of environments where stories are told and authored, has been genuinely inspiring. These types of literacy events, as Meek (1988:10) suggests are important for children to learn to read, as they offer the experience of engaging with ‘*the teller*’ of stories, by picking up on the author’s view and voice, and ‘*the told*’ which is about receiving the story and engaging in interpretation. Throughout this project the children participants have been both the ‘*teller*’ and the ‘*told*,’ sharing their experiences and expertise along the way. This was exemplified by the mini project where the children participants, with the support of me as an enabling adult, wrote, designed, and created a picturebook, thus becoming author/ ‘*scriptors*’ (Barthes, 1974:3) themselves (See Section 4.5.5). This endeavour, as mentioned in 4.5.4, echoes ideas a ‘*scriptor*’ who creates, by combining existing ideas and texts, new and original work. Therefore, in this instance these children participants adopted the role of ‘*scriptors*’ by designing all aspects of the story and even creating different working groups or teams dedicated to writing, editing and photography. What was key to this literacy event was the connections the children made between ‘*reading, writing and talking for pleasure*’ (Parry & Taylor, 2018:103) summarised as ‘*braids of literacy*’ (See Section 4.2.1) that were skilfully woven together (Wolf & Brice-Heath, 1992), in making their own picturebook. Creating imaginative spaces where children can create and tell their own stories allows for their distinctive voices and sharp insights to come through, thus fuelling their imagination and creativity.

5.9 In summary...

These six reading spaces demonstrate the children’s ability to, as I call it, author spaces. They are able to create and/or co-create reading spaces whether they are emotional, imaginative, textual spaces

(authoring their personal preferences), physical spaces (authoring their own unique reading spaces and understanding how spaces work ‘*environmental literacy*’ (Clark, 2010:120)) or metacognitive spaces (authoring their version of texts and how they work, as well as authoring their own stories). I use the term author here, as although Barthes’ work has been influential upon this research, in the context of the children as *authoring spaces* his concept of the ‘*scriptor*’ is less helpful. When the children were creating their picturebook their work could indeed be seen as more akin to being ‘*scriptors*’ rather than authors (See Section 4.5.4). Yet, when these children discussed, during child conferencing, ‘*authoring*’ different spaces, as outlined in the Reading Spaces Framework (See Figure 72), this was much more akin to Barthes (1977) description of the traditional role of authorship with the children authoring their own individual, unique experiences of reading, storytelling and creating stories. To enable these spaces to be created and/or co-created and to achieve higher levels of participation and autonomy, then, ‘*literacy events*’ (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:8) need to be designed where children are able to share their perceptions of reading, their experiences and expertise of being a reader and storyteller. Furthermore, engaging children in *authoring spaces*, in its many guises, shifts away from traditional perceptions of the child as passive recipient of adult created and adult delivered texts, to one of reader empowerment and agency (Conradi, Jang & Mckenna 2014:154).

5.10 Redressing the Balance: Implications for Educational Practice

This project has problematised and called into question the dominant discourse of reading in the classroom. It has attempted to foreground the necessity to redress the imbalance between the ‘*letter*’ of reading, reading instruction’ and the ‘*spirit*’ of reading, ‘*reading for pleasure*’ (Cremin, 2014:1). Within the classroom, priority is given to more functional instructional reading, driven by what Cremin, (2011:3) calls an ‘*accountability culture*’ with engagement in reading for pleasure seen as ‘*an optional extra in education, a desirable goal, not necessarily a core professional responsibility.*’ It could be argued that this dominant discourse of ‘*ongoing accountability pressures*’ makes it difficult for schools to ‘*find the time and space to foreground reader development and foster wider reading*’ (Cremin, 2011:2).

Traditionally, it is this dominant discourse of functional literacy that has been the motivation for many research enquiries with a particular focus on practitioner’s voices. However, in terms of reading, this is only part of the story and although research exploring reading for pleasure has been explored predominantly through the views and understandings of professionals, children’s voices have been

absent and ‘*quite silent*’ (Harris, 2015:27). This has led to a disparity between the amount of research carried out with regards functional reading and reading for pleasure, whilst calling into question whose knowledge counts (Clark & Moss, 2015). This project has attempted to bridge this gap and offer insights into children’s everydayness in terms of reading for pleasure.

5.10.1 Blurred Spaces

The framework, derived from the various forms of data, is based on the voices of children aged 4-to-5-years old and highlights the necessity to prioritise children’s reading for pleasure both in the classroom and in the home environment. This research has surfaced the children participants interests, hopes, fears, talents, and capabilities and offers potential opportunities to engage and encourage children and create positive autonomous spaces where children can share their experiences and expertise as readers, making explicit the tacit understandings of reading and reading environments.

A space that demands a great deal of attention, in classrooms, is physical reading spaces. Teachers spend a great deal of time engaged in the consideration, design, and development of these spaces. Physical reading spaces permeate the other reading spaces in the framework. The discussions with the children participants about physical spaces echoed throughout the research, especially the need for privacy and quiet, both within the classroom and at home. Although the main physical reading space created in this classroom was popular, what surfaced during conversations was this need for private and silent spaces which children could co-author, create and design (Clark, 2010), to enhance and encourage reading for pleasure.

The functional space in the framework also incorporated physical spaces, although within the classroom there was no specific designated instructional reading space, however for many children participants there appeared to be designated family space in which to perform proficiency of reading. Although this project was less interested in how reading is taught in schools and the more functional aspects of reading, functional spaces feature within the framework (see 5.4). This part of the framework is imbued with high levels of processes and procedures as well as policy requirements. It was interesting to hear the children talking about rules, routines and processes which contributed to their self-identification as reader or non-reader and the competitive nature of the environments these activities can create. Therefore, in terms of this space it would be helpful to talk to children about their experiences and expectations of this space and how it might be different. In addition, this space incorporated textual space with the use of reading schemes which the children barely mentioned during the project unless specifically asked about routines, processes, and procedures.

Textual space was also a key finding in terms of the Classroom Book Collection which, did not reflect or represent the children participants reading for pleasure choices they discussed during the research. This showed that textual space, although fundamental to engaging children in wider reading, must be carefully considered, and developed in consultation with the children who will be reading the books to ensure their '*mirrors and windows*' are represented in chosen texts (Bishop, 1990:1).

The children participants demonstrated throughout the research the ability to articulate their complex understandings of how texts work and how they read (see 5.6). This showed that the children have sophisticated understanding of how visual texts often tell the story with a view to encouraging and engaging imaginative spaces done through literacy events and storytelling, all of which are dependent on the quality of the textual spaces chosen. Reading for most evokes emotional experiences, both positive and negative. The emotional dimension of reading is important to develop empathic readings of other people's lives and points of view, experienced vicariously through textual spaces. This experience is wholly dependent on the quality of the text and metacognitive space of the developed through intertextuality and narrative gap. The physical space is also integral to the emotional space of reading in terms of feeling safe space all of which can be initiated through storytelling and sharing as well as literacy events.

5.10.2 Constructs of Readers

Each space does not exist in a vacuum, rather the spaces in the framework are interdependent. However, the functional space tends be less connected than the others. Although integrally interconnected with physical reading spaces, it is not necessarily about the textual quality of the reading artefact, reflecting the 'letter' of reading and reading instruction. In terms of the work of Barthes (1974 cited in Bensaïa, 2005:631) these ideas of spaces are aligned to constructs of '*readerly texts*' are 'linear narrative, transparency of meaning' that are '*closed off*' with little room for meaning construction positioning the reader as passive (see 2.3.4). That said, emotional space (see 5.7) is also connected to functional spaces, in terms of the children participants reactions to functional activities. These emotions surfaced in terms of competition, pressure of performance, self-identity non-reader and at times indifference, therefore this space often engenders more negative emotional states.

In contrast, the other spaces blur and are interdependent. For instance, as already discussed, if you design physical space in the classroom or indeed at home, then a significant element of the physical space will be the textual space. When deciding upon the textual space you will need to consider quality of text and think about the emotional, metacognitive, and imaginative spaces of the text. Each space of these spaces in the framework tend to reflect the '*spirit*' of reading and '*reading for pleasure*'

(Cremin, 2014:1). Returning to Barthes' work these reading spaces are situated within the domain of 'writerly texts' (see 2.3.5) which provoke 'plurality of meanings which goes beyond the logical or psychological construction of the text' demanding the reader actively participate in establishing meaning (Barthes, 1974 cited in Bensmaia, 2005:631). Both constructs and distinctions are wholly dependent on how one views the child reader, whether they are perceived as passive recipients or competent, talented active meaning makers, with these distinctions being fundamental to this thesis.

That is not to say both aspects are not important in children's reading but striking a balance between the responsibility to teach reading/literacy and to support and encourage wider reading and reading for pleasure, is key. This project has attempted to demonstrate, that children should actively engaged and immersed in oral and written language in spaces and communities that support reading, creativity, imagination, and inquiry. To do this, children need teaching professionals familiar with how to support and facilitate this (Serafini, 2020). The Reading Spaces Framework charted in this chapter (See Figure 72) highlights the need for teaching professionals to be readers and to have an understanding and knowledge of children as readers and engage with a wider reading pedagogy (Cremin, 2011, Timms, 2021). The idea of teachers as readers is extended to parents as readers and readers as parents. In terms of partnership working, what is apparent from this research is the children participants engage with reading communities including family, friends, and carers. Enhancing relationships and working more readily with families to focus on reading is important to harmonise reading across these different spaces and settings.

This framework (See Figure 72) does not profess to be a solution or remedy to the challenges faced around children's reading. Rather it is a framework that represents opportunities or for individuals to consider ways of engaging and encouraging children to share their reading experiences and expertise.

5.11 Research Recommendations

I propose four key recommendations underpinned by ideas of children authoring spaces, as follows:

5.11.1 Physical Spaces/'Setting' within the context of home and school, as this project testifies, is fundamental in the reading process. As discussed previously these spaces are wholly dependent on the 'set' of the individual who designs and create them. Therefore, listening to children's ideas/ 'set' about physical reading spaces will ensure their desires and requirements in terms of developing positive reading spaces are part of any decision-making process. This shift in focus allows children autonomy in authoring their own reading spaces rather than the domain of adults. This project demonstrates that children require their reading spaces offer opportunities to read in 'safe' and quiet

environments that support their developing reader identities. This study has implications for areas other than reading, therefore, in terms of listening to children's voices in the planning and designing of classroom spaces.

5.11.2 Literacy Events offer multiple opportunities and spaces to talk about favourite and much-loved books, how books work, storytelling and sharing, and authorship. Creating engaging and imaginative spaces is crucial in gaining insights into children's individual experiences of reading and being a reader. For many teaching professionals and parents these events are embedded in their practice and activities. To further enhance and extend such practice, this research suggests that dedicated literacy events should be developed to talk about children's experiences and their attitudes towards the more functional aspects of reading. In addition, I suggest creating regular literacy event spaces that offer opportunities to discuss children's changing understandings of how texts work.

5.11.3 Classroom and Home Book Collections. Another key recommendation is to consider the selection of books available for children in any context. This is integral to children's opportunities to develop their engagement and enjoyment of reading for pleasure. To enable a relevant and useful library of key books, collections should be created through discussion with the children in the setting/context to establish their preferences. This level of participation in terms of being listened to and decision making, aligned to Shier's (2001:110) pathway to participation, is essential in ensuring children's choices and autonomy are a priority.

5.11.4 Teachers as Readers. Throughout this research the teaching professionals discussed their preferences in terms of reading materials, spaces, and literacy events. Teacher 1 exemplified the idea of *'reading teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach'* (Cremin, 2014:67). This ties back into the concept of developing reading communities, in which adults and children are all valued participants as readers who share and support each other. Teacher 1's passion had found its match with Child 2 and her friends and their shared engagement, indicated by the teacher's comments about the children's reading. This also applied to my role as a researcher interested in books and reading. The notion of teachers as readers can, of course, be extended to include parents and family members (Wallace, 2021; Cremin, 2014). Teachers who read widely and have knowledge of children's literature are able to provide more holistic and creative reading programmes, literacy events and create positive reading environments.

These recommendations have already been discussed with the setting where the research was carried out and elements of it put into action. The teaching staff have implemented a review of the classroom collection and now have a literacy event when the children first arrive where they are consulted about

their much-loved books with a view to ensuring they are included in the collection. Changing the physical reading spaces within the setting is commonplace however the teaching team are mindful of the discussions had with the children participants with regards to opportunities for quiet reading and the material artefacts the children talked about as creating pleasurable reading spaces. Finally, the school in question were delighted with the picturebook the children created with my support, and I have been asked to return to the school to further develop authoring spaces.

5.12 Reflections & Implications for Further Research

Storytelling and is at the heart of this project. Whether that is the children's stories, the teaching professionals, the authors, the parents/guardians/carers or the researcher, each individual involved has a unique and personal story to tell about their own reading journey. The reading experiences of a group of four- and five-year-old children in one school setting cannot be generalised to reading and children more widely, but each child participant's perception of their reading experiences and reading journeys compelled me to think about the richness of each individual story and the framework is intended to enable similar discussions in other settings. So, rather than anticipate that the experiences of this group of children participants applied to all, which would negate the lived experiences of other children, the Reading Spaces Framework can help to ensure that genuine talking and listening takes place and therefore collections and spaces are relevant to any given group of children.

Over the time I have been conducting this research, I have had a great deal of time to reflect on the research process and outcomes. At the outset the ethnographic phase of the research created hugely valuable data of its own, but also helped me to reflect on how the second phase could progress. The use of participatory tools, then, was ethnographically inflected given that data. Given the importance of participation in the second phase, I have discussed my attempts at sharing power and decision making. However, regarding the participatory phase I felt I had failed to achieve level five of Shier's (2001) model, where '*children share power and responsibility for decision making*'. To attain full participation the children would have needed to be involved in every aspect of the research from the initial research focus, questions, aims and objectives, research approaches and data analysis, via asking what the children might find valuable and interesting to research.

That said, the mini project initiated during the main research plan, did, I feel, achieve full participation as the children planned together and then designed, constructed, and created their own picturebook. The experience of working with these amazing children has genuinely been a privilege. Their keen

insights and humour made the process truly enjoyable and taught me so much, not only about research processes and procedures, but about reading itself. These insights also afforded a glimpse into their complex understandings of meta literacy and the ways in which they skilfully subvert and challenge the *'drill and practice of skill acquisition'* (Saracho, 2004:201). At the end of the project, after speaking to the teaching professionals with regards to the recommendations listed above, I gave the children printed copies of the picturebook (see Appendix 5) with each child's name printed on the inside cover. On receipt of their individual copies, the children expressed delight at having an artefact that they created, designed, and written. These critical thinkers were able to articulate and share their complex thoughts about their unique experiences of reading, to enable me to map them into differing reading spaces to create a Reading Spaces Framework and in addition becoming the *'scriptors'* of their first picturebook. In doing so they have taken me on an extraordinary journey and shared, with me, their love of books.

And finally.....

Catarina Schmidt (2018:14) argues that *'in societies with democratic ambitions we must ask ourselves what happens with a human being or with a child, who cannot represent his or her thoughts, feelings and doings through language and literacy'*. To support children effectively teachers must be given time and space to design literacy teaching and learning that primarily draws on children's diverse cultural capital, making wider reading central, rather than marginal, in the classroom. This research project has been a voyage of discovery that has highlighted the role and value of creating environments that encourage and support children to participate fully in decisions and processes that affect their everyday experiences. This is particularly true when thinking about reading for pleasure and creating and telling stories, although it also has implications for the design of schools and the spaces within them.

However, I leave the final words to Meek (1988:40), who argued so passionately about the importance of reading for pleasure, that *'it is hard for anyone whose life has been enriched by books to exclude the young from this source of pleasure and serious reflection'*. She also saw the acts of making and reading books as powerful, as I feel this research suggests, and she even felt that, by interacting through books, adults and children could potentially change society. As Meek states, *'What we have to realise is that the young have powerful allies in a host of gifted artists and writers to help them subvert the world of their elders'* (1988:40).

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Appendices

Appendix One: Parent Questionnaire

Questionnaire –Parents

Names

Age

Gender.....

Reading Memories – Autobiographical

1. When you think about reading as a child what is the first thing you think of?

2. Can you remember any books you had as a child? Did you have a favourite one? Or a favourite author?

3. Did you mostly read on your own or with someone?

4. Did you have a favourite place to read?

5. Can you remember learning to read?

6. Did you learn to read before or at school?

Study Title: Listening to Young Children’s Voices: Researching Children’s Experiences of Reading for Pleasure.

Researcher: Linda Graham

Children’s Information Sheet 1 of 3



What is Research?

Research is a way we try to find out the answers to questions we ask

Why is this project being done?

This research is being done to look at what you like to read, where you like to read and who you like to read with.



Who is being asked to take part?

You and your classroom friends are being asked to take part.

Do I need to take part?

No, you don't.

It is your choice whether you take part and you can always change your mind. You don't have to give any reason. It is **YOUR** choice

Study Title: Listening to Young Children’s Voices: Researching Children’s Experiences of Reading for Pleasure.

Researcher: Linda Graham

Children’s Information Sheet 2 of 3

How will the research be done?

You will get a chance to draw, photograph and write down your ideas about reading in your own personal Scrapbook. The researcher will then ask you to work in a small group with your friends to talk about what you have done in your Scrapbook. Your conversations will be recorded using a small recording device and the researcher might need to take a few notes.

Will anything about the research upset me?

No, the study is safe.

If there is anything that upsets you can talk to your parents or the researcher

When will the project happen?

Once we have checked that you and your parents are happy to take part then you and your parents can ask any questions you have at any time

Study Title: Listening to Young Children's Voices: Researching Children's Experiences of Reading for Pleasure.

Researcher: Linda Graham

Children's Information Sheet 3 of 3



Will my information be kept private?

Your Scrapbook will be kept private, but the researcher might ask you to chat in your friendship groups about your work.

How long will the research take?

The research will probably take a few months to complete

What happens when the project stops?

The project will be talked about and written down, but no one will know that you took part

Will the research help me?

The project might not help immediately but it will help the teacher to think about other ways to help children enjoy reading more





Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

Study Title: Listening to Young Children’s Voices: Researching Children’s Experiences of Reading for Pleasure.

Investigator: Linda Graham

Participant Information sheet (Parent Consent)

Your child is being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide if you would like your child to take part it is important for you to read this leaflet so you understand why the study is being carried out and what it will involve.

Reading this leaflet, discussing it with others or asking any questions you might have will help you decide whether or not you would like to take part.

What is the Purpose of the Study

Children’s reading has long been a high priority in education. This project is concerned with exploring the choices children make with regards their reading choices. The purpose of the study is to gain insights into these choices by engaging children as researchers, researching

- where they read (physical spaces),
- who they read with (parents, alone, teachers, peers etc) and
- what they read/prefer (story spaces).

Why has my child been invited?

You have been invited is in the classroom where the research is going to take place and is an ideal opportunity to explore their experiences of reading choices.

Does my child have to take part?

No. It is up to you whether you are happy for your child to take part. I am giving you this information sheet to help you decide. You will be asked to sign a Parental Consent form to give permission for your child to be involved. Your child will also be involved in making the decision and given their

information sheet about the study in a child-friendly way and they will be asked to give verbal consent as well as your written consent.

It may be that you are happy for your child to take part but your child would rather not. This decision will be accepted without question. Your child can stop being involved in the study at any time.

What will happen if my child takes part?

The researcher will be spending time with the children in class over a 4-month period.

Your child will be asked to complete a Scrapbook in class time (although they may also opt to bring them home to complete). This activity will focus on the following:

- what do you enjoy reading - past/present (story spaces)
- where do you like to read (physical spaces),
- who do you like to read with (parents, alone, teachers, peers etc)

Your child will be asked to capture their thoughts about reading, in their Scrapbook by drawing, taking photographs, creating maps, collages, writing, or any other variants they decide. The Scrapbooks will be used as stimuli to open up small group discussions with the researcher as part of the classroom reading activities. Your child will be asked to take part in group discussions with 2/3 children which will take approximately 30 minutes and will be audio recorded using voice recording equipment, with yours and their permission. The researcher will also be making field notes regarding the completion of their specific Scrapbooks. Access to these audio recordings and field notes will be limited to the children and teachers of school and professional researcher in the setting along with their PHD research supervisors from Northumbria University (Dr.Mel Gibson & Dr Sean McCusker).

After the study

To check that the researcher has understood your child's ideas, she may ask to chat with them again to explain what she thinks she has learnt from them. Your child will then be given the opportunity to say whether the researcher has understood their conversations correctly.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

The project will record your child's experiences of reading. This is perhaps something your child will not have thought about much before and though unlikely, it might generate some feelings of apprehension. The researcher will be sensitive to the children's responses during the creation of the Scrapbooks and recordings. They do not have to speak in the task activities if they don't want to. The researcher will work very closely with the class teacher to make it a helpful, positive experience.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your child will contribute towards a better understanding of reading for pleasure in a primary setting. Which texts they enjoy and why, where they like to read so this can be built upon within the classroom. Finally, who they like to read with. All of which will have a positive impact on education and services if children are given the chance to be heard. Your child will also have the right to play an integral role as a participant in the project and can feel empowered when doing so.

Will my child taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?

Yes. Your child's name will not be written on any of the data we collect. His/her name will not appear in any reports or documents resulting from this study. The consent form you have signed will be stored separately from your other data. The data collected from the small group conversations will be kept confidential and your child's name will be anonymized. However, as these activities are in groups other children in the group may hear your child discussing their Scrapbook, so absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed, however your child will be advised of this as part of the ongoing consent discussion.

Confidential information about the school or a child that a researcher by chance overhears or that a participant specifically discloses will remain confidential, unless it is considered a risk and a safeguarding issue, which means it would then be referred to the teacher and safeguarding officer.

How will my child's data be stored?

Your child's Scrapbook will ultimately belong to them, although the researcher will use a scanner to copy the anonymized Scrapbooks and may reproduce pages or parts of pages in the final thesis and potential publications. The typed-up versions of their conversations, fieldnotes and your consent forms will be kept in locked storage. All electronic data including the audio recordings will be stored on the University U drive, which is password protected, and accessible only to Linda Graham. All data will be stored in accordance with University guidelines and the Data Protection Act (1998).

What will happen to the results of the study?

The general findings will be written up in the researcher's final project. These findings may also be reported in a research journal or presented at a research conference. However, the data will never include children's names. We can provide you with a summary of the findings from the study if you email the researcher at the address listed below.

l.graham@northumbria.ac.uk

Who is organising and funding the study?

The study has been organised and funded by Northumbria University.

Who has reviewed this study?

Before this study could begin, permissions were obtained from Northumbria University.

Study Title: Listening to Young Children's Voices: Researching Children's Experiences of Reading for Pleasure.

Investigator: Linda Graham (PHD Research Study)

Participant Information Sheet (Professionals)

What is the aims and objectives of the Study

The focus of this research project is working with children, teaching professionals and parents in an educational setting to talk about reading for pleasure. The researcher is interested in learning more about your experiences of reading as a child and your role in promoting reading for pleasure in the classroom.

Who is doing the research?

Linda Graham, a senior lecturer in Childhood Studies at Northumbria University for her PHD research project.

What will it involve?

Your participation in the project will involve 2 semi structured interviews. One at the beginning of the project and one towards the end. They will last for approximately ½ hour. The researcher will use an audio voice recorder.

Do I have to participate?

No. It is up to you whether you are happy to take part. I am giving you this information sheet to help you decide.

It may be that you are happy to take part but on reflection, you decide you would rather not. This decision will be accepted without question.

What happens to what I say?

Some of what is said will be written down or recorded on an audio device. Some will be included in a written report. All of it will be securely stored in the University U Drive and password protected. Your names and the name of the setting will be anonymized

The only time the researcher would pass on information would be if they thought that someone was being harmed or thought to be at risk of harm and it is considered a safeguarding issue, this would then be referred to the safeguarding officer.

How will my data be stored?

All electronic data including the audio recordings will be stored on the University U drive, which is password protected, and accessible only to Linda Graham. All data will be stored in accordance with University guidelines and the Data Protection Act (1998).

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