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responding to literary texts*

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**ANNE WALTER**

**MAKING SENSE OF TEXTS: TEACHERS AND CHILDREN  
RESPONDING TO LITERARY TEXTS.**

Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education. 1994.

The subject of this study is literacy. In it, we explore literacy as a concept and, more particularly, what we mean by schooled literacy.

The first issue addressed is what we regard as literature and how we, as practising teachers, go about judging what is a good book for children. We then move beyond the book into the risky area of reader response. Does the text invite response? Does the child reader respond because of an innate need for narrative, or is response to text learned? Are there ways in which the child reader might be encouraged to develop response within the social setting of the classroom, yet be allowed to develop a response which is personal but not individual?

From this, we move to a consideration of the effect of schooled literacy upon the development of the child's identity as a reader. We examine whether the traditional view of literacy is detrimental or beneficial to the child's development as a literate being, and consider how we reconcile judging readers by absolute standards with what we know about the continuum of literacy and the child's position on it.

This leads us to an examination of the teacher's role as a mediator, and of how his or her perceptions of the reading process affect the child. The teacher as collaborator is viewed against the teacher as assessor, and the tensions between these two roles are considered. This is extended to include an examination of the teacher's perceptions of the role of literature in the teaching of literacy.

The conclusion reached is of the importance of the child's perception of him or herself as a reader, as well as the crucial nature of the teacher's role as collaborator.

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MAKING SENSE OF TEXTS

TEACHERS AND CHILDREN RESPONDING TO LITERARY TEXTS

Anne Walter

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Education,  
University of Durham

1994



I gratefully acknowledge the help and support I have received  
from my supervisor, Dr Peter Millward,  
from my pupils, Antonia, Erinn and Victoria,  
and from my family, Robin, Jane and Alex.

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*All quotations from children's work are presented with their original spelling and punctuation.*

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## Research Methodology .

My original design was to devise activities which would

- 1) Illuminate the child's view and understanding of the text, and look at the implications for the teacher.
- 2) Explore the teacher's understanding of the child's view of the text.

My position as teacher/researcher was as Form Mistress and English teacher to successive classes of Year 6 girls (that is, aged from ten to eleven years), over the period of research, as well as English teacher to Year 4 (that is, aged from eight to nine years). The Year 6 Group 1990-1991 were also taught one lesson per week allotted for research purposes during the academic year, 1991-1992, when they had moved to the Senior Department of the school. Three girls from this group, that is, Victoria, Erinn and Antonia, have continued to meet as a 'Literature Group' during one lunch time each week from the academic year 1992 up to the present.

During the first year of research, approximately two or three pieces of work each week in response to literature were gathered from each child in the course of teaching. This was supported by a great deal of quantitative evidence, in the hope, first of all, of learning much more about the reading process, and also, of designing ways to measure and assess response to text. However, as research progressed, the shift to a more qualitative paradigm gradually imposed itself upon my research design.

A major difficulty in using quantitative evidence was that although patterns emerged, when tested rigorously they were apt to break and reform according to sampling. Also, questionnaire design influenced results more than had been foreseen. Oppenheim (Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement) suggests that a pre-requisite to good questionnaire design is first to decide which conclusion we would wish to draw. However, when working with children as a teacher-researcher within the classroom situation, the inherent difficulty was that the respondents biased their evidence in favour of what they thought was required. Evidence lacked precision because children, it was finally concluded, respond superficially to questionnaires, and shift their stance substantially, not only from day to day, but within the course of a lesson. Such a high level of persuasability, therefore, invalidated data which could be responded to superficially. The main value of quantitative evidence was that it enabled the categorizing of, and subsequent focussing upon typical rather than idiosyncratic individual representative figures.

At this stage of research, i.e. the second year, it emerged that it was necessary to go beyond initial pre-conceptions. The original conceptual framework of each child responding in a measurable and predictable way to a text that could be 'matched' fairly effectively with the child's needs was proved to be as invalid as it was impractical, since new theoretical integrations pointed increasingly to the validity of Vygotsky's statement that

'any psychological process is one that changes before one's eyes...it must be studied as a dynamic, living process. (Mind in Society, 1968, p.67)

This exemplified the problem of designing specific ways of measuring response if response was subject to change in the course of the measurement. Not only this; vast amounts of qualitative responses to literature such as designed comprehension sheets, book reviews, carefully monitored reading lists, attitude-measuring questionnaires, discussions and surveys, seemed to defy analysis that was replicable.

What was beginning to emerge was the sheer complexity of the task, and also, the importance of the social quality of learning. While the programme design of each task was important in the way that it provided the setting and support for learning, the essential part seemed to be in the quality of collaboration within the learning situation. This quality depended heavily upon the effective communication of ideas and responses. Through this began to emerge the centrality of narrative.

Almost all of the data displayed within this thesis is in the form of narrative text, and little of it resulted from tightly structured research questions. As the work progressed, it became increasingly obvious that a loosely structured, emergent approach to gathering data was an efficient way of testing empirically within the classroom the validity of the conclusions reached by research theorists such as Gordon Wells (The Meaning Makers), Robert Protherough (Developing Response to Fiction), Lev Vygotsky (Mind in Society), Margaret Meek et al (Achieving Literacy), Harold Rosen (The Nurture of Narrative). As Miles and Huberman emphasised, when using qualitative evidence, important research questions often develop late in the process of data gathering.

Using this emergent framework to scaffold (in the Brunerian sense) my research design, a causal network was gradually built up of the relationship between the child, the book and the teacher as mediator. This involved, mostly, research of a qualitative nature. The problem of drawing valid, practical and communicable conclusions from such data was that much classroom research is intuitive, and therefore is not easily communicable. It was, nonetheless, felt to be the most productive way of exploring response .

Taped conversations of the girls within the Literature Group make up the most valuable data in the exploration of response. These conversations are presented as transcripts, though the tapes are supplied so that the reader may more fully appreciate the thought processes of the girls in action. My purpose in setting up the discussion was to give the girls a series of questions which would provide a framework around which we could build patterns of response. In the event, discussion was generated from within the group. As can be heard on Tape 1 Side 1, my participation was not particularly helpful, and on Tape 1 Side 2, was almost unnecessary. During the latter session, Antonia came to the task full of her own ideas and needed very little encouragement in any form.

Data provided on Tape 2, Side 1 is of a class discussion of Year 6 children talking within the course of an English lesson. My aim in setting up this task was, from the research point of view, to encourage the children to talk about 'comprehension exercises' and to try to

extract some explanation as to why such exercises are treated with antipathy.

Tape 2 Side 2 contains data in the form of a class discussion, done with the same class within the context of an English lesson, discussing response through art work. A parallel class of Year 6 girls had been asked to read 'The Thought Fox' by Ted Hughes, then to respond to it in terms of artwork. The results had been interpreted by me and had been displayed as appropriately as possible beside a copy of the poem (seen in Pictures E-R) The resulting discussion is both a criticism and evaluation of the other class's work and of my interpretation and presentation of that work. This provided a double source of information; data was gathered through the pictures, which also provided a mechanism for helping children to articulate response, and provided the opportunity for examining informants' talk about the pictures. Both parts of this exercise provide us with valuable insights, and demonstrate how the advantages of a pre-determined structure give way to the informant centred data which reflects the respondent's interests and concerns.

Some data is presented quantitatively (e.g. Context Chart 1), essentially to display a simple checklist of responses to texts. This data was gathered again within the course of an English lesson, where the children were asked to make a list of their ten favourite books. They were allowed to talk between themselves during the task, but no teacher guidance was given during the exercise.

Context Chart 2 contains data gathered within the context of an English lesson, and focuses on the responses of the class to a series of group lessons. It was my intention in these group lessons that the lack of pre-determined structure would allow responses to text to emerge within the course of discussions in a way which was not confined by my view of the task.

An example of a structured instrument is the teacher questionnaire supplied in Appendix 1, which was completed by the staff within my school. This was an observation exercise, and staff were unaware of the nature of my research at the time of completion (December 1992) so were unlikely to have been influenced by considerations of my requirements other than those which had been made explicit by the questionnaire.

What I hoped to find out, by methods that would avoid explicit, confrontational questions which might make the respondents feel threatened, the ways in which teachers respond to the needs of individual pupils. It was hoped that data would provide explicit information about teaching methods, would show whether it was felt that group response modifies individual response, would reveal what teachers know about the processes of reading, would demonstrate how much teaching is conditioned to personalities, would consider the classroom as an appropriate social setting in which collaboration might take place, could explore commitment to the task and understanding of the needs of each pupil. I hoped to identify influential factors then, by qualitative data analysis, discover which important conditions were missing.

In the event, some data was provided which resulted in useful findings of sufficient quality to contribute to my argument. However, many of the answers were superficial, such as those in reply to Question One, to which the prevailing response was one of anger that any student should come to a lesson unprepared. Other answers, such as those to question 2, merely produced details of the physical limitations of the

classrooms rather than a considered reaction to the effects of the social setting of the teaching. The main criterion given for choosing texts was availability (what we have in the cupboard).

It would seem that, in consideration of the pressing claims upon the time of the English teacher, I had not taken into account the effect of my instruction to use a 'brainstorm technique'. This may have been a contributory factor in the brevity of many answers, and the superficial nature of some of the data supplied.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the demands of conducting good qualitative research are not small. It has been necessary to give great thought to sampling, to assessing and to presenting the data that has led to the conclusions which have made this research project so rewarding in terms of learning how to teach more effectively. In researching a 'dynamic, living process that changes before one's eyes', the excitement of seeing learning in action far outweighs the problems in conducting such a project.

## CHAPTER ONE.

An examination of what is meant by a children's text, and an exploration of the criteria by which we judge a 'good' book for children.

When we first approach the problem of how a children's text can be defined, it immediately becomes apparent that the word 'text' could be used to refer to many different forms of recorded language in many different media. For the purposes of this study, the term 'children's text' is taken to mean that printed in book form under the heading of 'fiction'. However, even while the term is so narrowly defined, it must yet become even more focused and precise if we are to make a sufficiently careful examination of what is meant by a text suitable for children.

How do we qualify what we mean by a children's book? Who is most qualified to make this decision? Is children's writing a genre in which significant features -language, content, meaning, characterisation,- are scaled down, or would this be to imply that children's books have less complexity than adults' books? With some reference to this general perception, the authors (1) of a collection of essays about children's books emphasised:

"If the author's art is good enough, books for children are an essential part of the whole realm of literary activity, to be discussed in the same terms and judged by the same standards as would apply to any other branch of writing."

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is meant by that essential part of the whole realm of literary activity regarded as good literature for children. It is initially concerned with an examination of what might be considered the conventional field of good literature, but then moves on to the problems of defining a canon. Within this, the

emergence of children's writers as being those most nearly concerned with such a canon is considered to be of primary importance, with the result that some consideration is given to their views. An inspection of writers' notions of what is a 'good enough' art is made, and also of the criteria felt to be essential to writing books for children. As people who have an interest in this debate, children's opinions are also considered, lightly in this chapter, then more fully in Chapter Two.

From this discussion emerges the complexity of the task, which leads us to a subsequent analysis of the elements of that history which have contributed to the writer's experience, to his or her ideology, to his or her knowledge and experience of language, and to his or her intertextual memory, (that is, the texts which have sedimented in the memory to become part of the writer's own language).

Throughout this and subsequent chapters, it becomes increasingly obvious that texts which are created for children cannot avoid being firmly embedded within the writer's culture and within the culture into which the text is received. The writer writes with an idea of the context in which the finished product of the book will be read. He or she is inevitably aware of the sense in which his or her language becomes public when printed and, in a sense, has been public from the beginning since the writer cannot avoid using the metacode embedded within the socio-cultural background of his or her learned language.

A further consideration must be of those other constraints put upon the writer which may influence the text's validity and importance. The argument against constraints is then considered in the light of the child's development. Moral issues are examined with regard to such issues as tragedy, sexuality and violence within children's literature,

and their potential effects upon the reader.

From this, emerges the key point that we cannot properly define what is a good book for any reader without taking into account response. This points not only to the necessity of the text's being interpretatively accessible to the reader, but also to the importance of the role of teacher as mediator in this respect.

If this accessibility of text seems to imply that the teacher's mediating role is one in which texts of suitable simplicity or complexity could be 'matched' with the child as he or she reached a suitable point in maturity as a reader, then this must be refuted. The final point made in this chapter is that the problem of 'matching' book to pupil cannot be satisfactorily addressed in such simplistic terms. Discussion hinged upon the notion of the text and the reader as constants must necessarily be confined within its own limitations. The nature of the relationship between the child and the text cannot satisfactorily be examined without further consideration of what is implied by the term 'matching book to pupil'. This leads to the consideration of reader response to text and its implications in Chapter Two.

An initial examination of what we mean by a children's text implies that what is involved is a discussion of literary values between those people who are professionally concerned with children and books. A university library shelf of books on the subject may reveal that, for the most part, the opinions most often taken into account are those of educationalists, psychologists, literary critics, researchers and, very occasionally, children's writers. To those involved on a daily basis

with education, it would seem to be at least possible that the people most equipped to judge 'good books' must be the children, and yet widely used and influential commentaries often do not take into account even the most informed opinions of young readers. It must, of course, be acknowledged that providing a satisfactory definition implies the ability to *define* the parameters of what can, or cannot be regarded as 'good' for children, and that therefore there are inherent difficulties for the young reader. We must, nevertheless, remember that the child can say with authority, 'this is a good book', and if the adult reader then denies literary merit of any description, he or she must be aware that in doing so, he or she is denying the child's authority.

One premise from which this research begins is that, as authorities, children can be much more articulate than has hitherto been suggested, and this study concerns itself with such authoritative statements as must concern those who have an interest in qualifying children's literature. References are made to children's opinions throughout, and their responses are considered very seriously.

This is not to say that the difficulties of considering such responses are limited to the child's lacking sufficient experience to be considered an authority. When confronted with the concept of providing a definition, the child may feel unequal to the task, and fearful of 'getting it wrong'. Further, since a definition of writing for children implies to some extent differentiation between an adult novel and a child's novel, the ability to make such a definition would presuppose some knowledge of both. Since the child's knowledge of adult literature must be limited, it is obvious that some adult opinions must be taken into account.

One would assume that those adults most interested in the criteria to be used in ascribing literary value to children's books would be those most nearly concerned, namely, children's writers. It seems most sensible, therefore, to examine how writers of children's books would define a children's book, since they must have given careful consideration to the criteria needed. Having identified the conventional field of what is regarded as children's literature, we can then dig beneath the surface to reveal the essentially abstract concepts that underpin such definitions.

How, then does the writer begin to define such a concept of a book 'good' for children? Jill Paton Walsh(2) comments that;

" The children's book presents a technically most difficult, technically most interesting problem - that of making a fully serious adult statement, as a good novel of any kind does, and making it utterly simple and transparent."

Thus, Walsh supplies us with the first criterion, namely that a good novel, whether written for children or adults, must make a serious statement. This seems a good premise from which to begin, though the final part of Walsh's statement needs to be challenged. What would an utterly simple and transparent text be? Must the text be accessible and apparent? And if this is so, to which reader in which context at which level of maturity could a fully serious and adult statement be utterly simple and transparent? Assuming such writing might be possible, what would be the advantage of increasing its complexity for an adult audience? If we do assume that the children's text must be utterly simple and transparent, would this be to say that every children's text must, by necessity, be shallow?

These questions must be dealt with if we are to provide a

systematic account of good literature. In analysing a text, it is important to discern the structural elements which constitute a piece of good writing, but it is equally important to reveal the creative idea behind it, and those elements which have become subsumed in the writing, but which are of great importance in such an examination as this. While analysing surface structures, it is important to remember that literature is an aspect of human communication, and that language is the medium of that communication. As Marion Whitehead (3) emphasises, good literature:

'purposely exploits the ways in which language may be ambiguous, subtle and evocative. It does not aspire to be foolproof, but launches itself into the risky areas of reader responses and individual interpretations'.

Using this as a criterion, we see that that a simple and transparent text could not, by this definition, be regarded as good literature. Simple and transparent language must imply an absence of subtlety and ambiguity which, in turn, implies a text that is shallow in its meaning and interpretative possibilities. Unfortunately, many books within reading schemes fall into this category, as do many books written as books for youngest readers. If we examine one that might be considered as such, we see that any analysis must reveal its falling very short of what we might regard as good literature. The 'Animal Shapes' series (4) are limited and limiting. The text, written with a sentence on each page, invites little response;

Puppies love to play. Puppies love to chew. Puppies can wag their tails. Puppies can dig with their paws.<sup>1</sup>

The text within the pictures is equally limiting, showing a largely empty landscape behind simplistic drawings of a child and a puppy. The language of this text does not seem to approach ambiguity or subtlety;

nor is it evocative. Nor, however, could it be utterly simple and transparent. As a 'first' book, it must already draw upon the child's experience as a literate being already established on the continuum of literacy. It does not fulfil any of the criteria suggested by Marion Whitehead, printed above.

If, in contrast, we examine Janet and Allan Ahlberg's 'Peepo', (5) written for equally young children, we see that, while the text is superficially simple, it nonetheless does, under close analysis, reveal a fully serious statement. First of all, the title draws on the experience of the young child in the suggestion of a game common to many adults and children. The text is written in short, four line verses similar to nursery rhyme structures:

Here's a little baby  
One, two, three  
Stands in his cot  
What does he see?

On the opposite page, a peephole focuses the child's attention on a central character or object (for instance on the first page, we see a picture of the father in bed), which is part of a picture on the page underneath. When this page is revealed, it shows a picture busy with areas of interest. The central area shown through the keyhole is then focused through the continuing written text, and enlarged gradually;

He sees his father sleeping  
In the big brass bed  
And his mother too  
With a hairnet on her head.

He sees the shadows moving  
On the bedroom wall  
And the sun at the window  
And his teddy  
And his ball.

This text is not shallow, yet it is accessible because of the way in

which the Ahlbergs have cleverly led the reader into it, little by little. It contains language which is ambiguous, subtle, evocative, and invites response in many ways. The young child, on being shown this page, points to the mother and father in bed. If we look back through the peephole once the page has been turned, we see that the baby in the cot is pointing his finger at his parents. At this simplest level, the reader can respond in a way that is natural, yet that is supported by the text. It is designed so that each element invites active engagement.

So the text is, in some ways, accessible at the level at which the child reads, yet it has the interpretative possibility of being deeply complex at other levels. Inferential information contained within the illustrations, such as the Fair Isle knitted pullover hanging on the end of the bed, the copper posstube stick on the next page, evokes a historical setting which invites the older reader to engage in a way that the younger reader could not. Each page invites engagement at a variety of levels, ranging from the trivial experiences always relevant to the young child to the portrayal of evocative items such as a gasmask on the mantelpiece. We see that, not only does this text invite interpretation at many levels, but that it may also invite reminiscences and other stories to be shared, so that the text may be enriched further by such stories that grow out of shared readings.

We see, therefore, that when we analyse this text, the creative idea behind the text can be strongly expressed through structures which lend themselves to the decoding process and to interpretation *if the art is good enough*. The writer's medium is still language, even though presented largely in a graphic text, and this language must be cleverly embedded within the pictures so that the message becomes apparent

gradually. Examples of how this works in practice are demonstrated by Gordon Wells (6) in his conversations recorded between parents and young children talking about books. The text is enriched through their exchanges, and becomes further enriched by repeated readings and repeated exchanges as the child reaches different levels of understanding. However, before we go further with this, we must ask ourselves what we mean by this essentially abstract concept of *levels*, of understanding.

If the concept of levels means anything in real terms, we must assume that the message which the writer tries to convey can be both simple and apparent *at the level at which the child is reading* but that the good children's book must be written so that different layers of complexity become apparent and transparent as the child's understanding, experience and maturity deepen. However, this must be clarified further. What do we mean by reading maturity? Geoffrey Treece emphasises (7);

"..the writer is left with one obvious and inescapable difference between child and adult readers: the former have not lived so long, and in the nature of things they cannot have built up the same mental and emotional capital of background knowledge and first hand experience...If the author is to communicate effectively, he cannot risk making too many assumptions".

If we assume that the reader follows a progression through levels of reading maturity then, to some extent, this must mean levels achieved through experience. Part of the writer's notion of communication must be to supply sufficient information for the reader to be able to make sense of what he or she is reading, in terms of a reality which he or she has experienced. Whether this sense of reality has been built up through first hand experience, or vicariously, we assume that the child must be able to feel that what is being communicated has its foundation in a

fully serious statement which means something real to the reader. This raises another question.

How can children's books make a fully serious statement when so many of them are based on fantasy and fairy tale? Maurice Sendak (8) answers this question as he develops the theme that fantasy *is part of* real life to the young child. His book 'Where the Wild Things Are' (9) was his personal response to the real problem of being a young child surrounded by potentially threatening adults, so that what we might regard as being at the level of fantasy without any attempt at reality is, in fact, firmly embedded within real life experience:

" (People who had come to our house)..had great big teeth, immense nostrils, and very sweaty foreheads. I often remember that vision and how it frightened me....Wild Things is really the anxiety and pleasure and immense problem of being a small child."

Sendak shows that the creative idea behind his book is more firmly embedded within the child's reality than the surface structure might suggest to the adult reader. These points of contact with reality may be rooted deeply within the child's inner needs, as in Sendak's writing, or may be at a very superficial level of experience, as is illustrated by Antonia, who shows by her comments that the most basic experience can help the reader 'get into' the text: (Tape 1 Side 2.)

"Even whether you've got brothers and sisters....if a brother tells his sister, 'don't be stupid' or something you think of your brother saying that and you can imagine the expression on the face and the sound of the voice, whereas if you haven't experienced that, you can't really feel it..what the feeling is.."

We cannot suppose from this that the writer is constricted to write within the limits of the child's experience, since this would seem to return to the notion of the text as being utterly simple. It would be foolish to assume that Antonia's or any other reader's experience is

limited to what he or she has personally experienced. Wittgenstein (10) reminds us that such limits are not only defined by experience;

'the limits of my language are the limits of my world',

and the child's language is not limited to that which he or she has directly experienced. Treece (11) mentions above, not only the importance of real life experience but also *background knowledge*. An important part of this background knowledge must be the child's former experience of texts. This begins to reveal the complexity of what the writer is trying to achieve when he sets him or herself the task of providing sufficient information to communicate fully with the reader. He or she must take into account, not only the child's past experiences, vicarious and real, but must also be aware of the limits of the child's language experience through the texts which he or she has read.

Nick Jones (12) refers to those other language experiences built up through the associative networks of textual memory as 'intertext'. This intertext is what each reader has taken from all the language he or she has experienced, with an emphasis upon literacy. As we develop this further, we begin to see that each reader's approach to the text must be unique, since each experience has been subjective, and therefore totally different from the experiences of all other readers, even while acknowledging that his or her intertextuality has been developed in the literate community.

At the level of surface structure, this knowledge of other texts must be irremediably bound up with knowledge about language. Only through experience of texts, can the child come to know what to expect in terms of format, or build knowledge of such concepts as a beginning, a middle and an end, (of where the beginning can be found in the book as

an object), of directionality of writing, of conventions which writers use. He or she comes to know 'story grammars', so that the knowledge of intertext becomes a framework or scaffolding which supports the reader.

If the writer of children's texts uses this framework of the child's knowledge about language, then he or she is able to write in a way that is not shallow, in that different layers of meaning can be built into the text, to be revealed as the child's knowledge and experience increase, or as he or she reads a text 'differently'. Whether we refer to this increase of knowledge and experience as a framework, or whether we develop the metaphor of scaffolding to imply building one level upon the last in the progression of the child's becoming literate, what we are discussing is that developed ability to connect with progressively deeper layers of meaning.

In order to connect with these deeper layers of meaning, the child's past experience of texts is obviously important and, since many children read or demand to be told the same stories again and again, we must assume that part of the process of erecting this framework is in experiencing a text until nothing further can be learned from it. Donald Fry (13) presents strong evidence to support this in his study of children talking about books. He makes the point that;

"Possessing, remembering, reproducing, renewing - underlie a child's constant re-reading of a story."

In effect, the text must be of that quality to support the child while he or she masters the conceptual knowledge explicit in the language structures and implicit in what is written, after which the child returns to the same text equipped with new knowledge to go through the same processes at a deeper level.

If, as Frank Smith (14) believes, children enjoy learning, and only abandon a text when there is no more new knowledge to be gained from it, then, in demanding repetition of the same story, it would seem that if the text is good enough, the child learns something new with *every* hearing or with *every* reading until the point is reached when there is nothing else to learn at that particular point in the child's development. This can only happen if the text is deep enough to sustain re-readings at different levels.

Can we therefore assume that the child, as he or she accumulates experience throughout the text, reaches down through further layers of meaning? Does this mean that texts which are shallow in content are more likely to be discarded at an earlier stage? This brings us back to the difficulty of asking the child to define what is a children's book, or what is a good book. It would seem that the child might enjoy a book at one stage of development but then, at the point at which the text has nothing more to offer, may no longer admit that it is good or, indeed, ever was regarded as being good. This may be so of texts which dominated his or her reading to the exclusion of all other texts. Such texts as the 'Secret Seven' series by Enid Blyton may be popular for some years, then very suddenly become 'boring', which implies that the layers of meaning within the text are limited.

This is not to denigrate Blyton texts. As a discussion with McKellar(15) shows, Blyton's creative intentions were strongly cinematic rather than deeply meaningful, with a heavy reliance on good plots.

The important part which Blyton texts can play in erecting the child's framework of learning is explored further in Chapter Two, but for the present, it is important to note that her concept of a

children's text, though predominantly visual and therefore often considered to be lacking in depth, fulfilled her intentions as a writer and could be regarded as 'good writing' at the level of providing a strong scaffolding upon which the child is able to build his or her knowledge about language. Not only this. Any 'canon' of good literature as defined by a group of children is fairly certain to have several of Blyton's books upon it. ( See, for example, Context Chart 1.) When defining what is 'good' children's literature, therefore, even while Blyton texts might be regarded as shallow, it must be taken into account that at some stages of development as a reader, such texts play an important part in developing response.

Since many readers very quickly 'grow out of' shallow texts, we must assume that the reader reads a text until he or she has made it his or her own, part of his or her intertext. A criterion of good literature would seem to be that which will support repeated readings. Complexity of text, therefore, must surely match potential re-readability to some extent. The reader must be able to interpret the text in the light of his or her gathering knowledge of intertext, which is what Barthes (16) refers to as the reader 'filling the gaps' and of 'good' writers producing writerly texts which give space for interpretation at at increasingly deep levels.

Alan Garner refers to this writing at potentially different levels as 'writing onions' (17), so that layer after layer can be revealed as the child matures and develops as a reader. He sets out deliberately to do this;

"Within this group (ten to eighteen year olds), the age of the individual does not necessarily relate to the maturity. Therefore, in order to connect, the book must be written for all levels of experience. This means that any given piece of text must work at a

simple plot level....."

This is explored much more fully in Chapter Two, where a close examination of response to Garner's 'The Owl Service' (18) reveals that it does indeed work at many levels, and that the ten-year-old child can enjoy it at simple plot level, even though the most basic information is withheld for some pages, while the older reader is aware of information which is implicit within the text, but not made obvious.

One therefore cannot assume that what is commonly classified as a 'good' children's book will be one in which information is made explicit, either at the level of early reading, or at the level of sophistication which Garner has achieved. What we can assume is that the writer of a children's book will have taken into account that the child's experience both of life and of texts will be more limited than that of the adult, so that any good text must work at least at simple plot level, as well as having interpretative potential.

A further example of this is Lewis's 'Narnia' series which are read and enjoyed by many young children who remain unaware of his use of allegory to explore the story of Christ. Lewis writes (19).;

"The Narnian books are not as much allegory as supposal. Suppose there were a Narnian world and it, like ours needs redemption. What kind of incarnation and Passion might Christ be supposed to undergo there?"

While the allegorical parallels are obvious to the more experienced reader who is familiar with the story of the gospel, and familiar with the use of allegory, the story of Aslan stands successfully in its own right at the level of supposal. The Narnia books invite the child to enter a world which is accessible as a story. Lewis goes on to say;

"Writing juveniles certainly modified my habits of composition. Thus it, a) imposed a strict limit on vocabulary b) excluded erotic love c) *cut down reflective and analytical passages*, d) led me to produce

chapters of nearly equal length, for convenience in reading aloud."  
(my italics)

In the climax of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' (20), the reader is not invited to reflect upon the death of Aslan, but is simply invited to share Lucy and Susan's tremendous sense of loss and pain as they cry for the whole night. The child is shown, not told, what this means to the girls, and reflective or analytical writing would serve more to weaken the impact for the child reader rather than strengthen it. The intentions of the children's writer are therefore to reduce the message in form but not impact. Garner (21) emphasises this;

.....simplicity, pace, compressions are needed, so that the reader who has not experienced what I am getting at will not be held up, since the same text is also fulfilling the demands of the plot....this discipline has made me reduce what I have to say to its purest form, communicating primarily with the emotions. Didactic writing is unworked writing. It is my job to show, not tell."

Do we therefore regard the children's book as creatively less significant than those written for adults?

C.S.Lewis says (22), 'No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and far often more) worth reading at the age of fifty' which implies that good writers set out with the intention of writing a children's book which contains levels of complexity of meaning relevant to the mature adult reader. From the earliest stages of literary experience, as with the Ahlberg's book for 'babies', the text can be written so as to provide insights upon the world as the reader perceives it.

If this is the case, one must look at the corollary that at some point the text must become so complex that we could no longer regard it as being a children's book. William Golding's book, 'Lord of the Flies' (23), reveals the difficulties inherent in using such a text in

school, with readers who are presented with it, not because they have reached that level of maturity to engage fully with what is written, but because they have all reached a chronological age thought to be 'suitable'.

If we examine the creative idea behind the text, we see that Golding had suffered the horrors of war, and had come to the conclusion that man's problems are deeply rooted in his own nature. Since he wanted to convey this without the relatively trivial concern of sex, or politics, he chose young boys as the medium through which he could write most effectively. Having been a schoolmaster, he was aware that the play of children which he regularly experienced in the playground reflected what he had seen in the war.

It is possible that Golding meant the book to be read at the level of childhood experience reached by the young reader, in that the adventures of the boys on the island are an acting out in real terms of many playground games, or it may be that he did not intend that this should be a book for children at all. Perhaps the sole reason why it is so popular with teachers in school is that the main characters are children. While delivering the lecture referred to above Golding addressed the problem of using such a text as a measure of the child's comprehension, and said to students;

"..I am moved and fulfilled by the fact that anyone of your generation should think a book I have written is significant for you. But this is the standard form of the letters I get from most English speaking parts of the world.  
Dear Mr. Golding, I and my friend so and so have read your book, Lord of the Flies .... there are some things in it which we are not able to understand. We shall be glad, therefore, if you will kindly answer the following forty one questions. A prompt reply would oblige as exams start next week." (25)

It would seem that educational practice expects the child to respond

with a degree of maturity which implies considerable intertextual and real life experience, and also considerable conformity in levels of maturation. In the light of what Golding has to say, we are left with the question, can we really regard 'Lord of the Flies' as a children's book suitable for collective study by children of a specific age group in school? Golding's reaction would imply not, since the comment 'anyone of your generation' might suggest that the real significance of the novel is most readily perceived by the older reader.

When using texts as class readers, our rationale seems to be that the text will be mediated by the teacher, whose experience must be quantitatively greater than the child's, and who therefore might be expected to lead the child towards a deeper understanding and response. In this, we depend upon Vygotsky's notion of the teacher being able to support the child's learning, and helping the pupil to respond within his or her proximal zone of development. (26) Response in the classroom must be of a social nature as the teacher scaffolds the child's learning, and encourages more able pupils to collaborate with the less able in the process of learning. Can we, therefore, assume that the adolescent who experiences this text in the course of group discussion is able to take from it points of value and to re-examine the text in that new light? Can we really assume that by this method *all* the children who study it have reached a certain level of being able to draw the sort of inferences which might be needed in order to answer comprehension questions? Golding's experience would suggest that we cannot. However, before we examine the implications of the social nature of the child's learning in school, it is important to look at the social nature of the interaction between the reader and the writer.

When the writer composes a book, he or she draws to some extent on a corpus of experience distilled through memory, as well as that intertext which has become a part of him or herself. The writer's past, the language which he or she has experienced, the ideologies which are a result of those experiences all may have contributed to his or her creativity as a writer. His or her intentions are channelled through the medium of a language which, as we have said previously, is a public language from the beginning. This public language is embedded helplessly within common cultural codes, and presupposes a sharing of those codes with the reader. As David Olson suggests (27);

"The link between the structures of society and the structures of the individual are to be found in their sharing of a common language which, in this case, is the metalanguage for referring to language. It is in this common language that we may find an identity between what is taught and what is learned."

We can only discuss books in terms of this metalanguage. If the codes which the writer presupposes to be common are not shared by the reader, then this must disempower, to some extent, not only the reader, but the writer. We must go further. The language which we use to describe the language used in texts is deeply embedded within cultural codes. What we read is interpreted through these codes. Work with foreign students learning to read reveals that much of the significance of the text is lost without a shared common cultural code which is a pre-requisite of a shared meta-code. One would suggest that while a straightforward copy of events can be conveyed across cultures and across timespans, meaning can only be conveyed fully if the writer and the reader share, to some extent, the same metacode.

What Golding tried to convey through his narrative as a metacode was the sense in which the world of his island is managed and sustained in

terms of reality which is recognisable as common human experience. The answers to the students' questions in many ways were not to be found within the text itself, but within the context of a *shared* reality, and against a knowledge or acknowledgement of the potential evil within each of us, and of Golding's island as a microcosm of the world we live in.

If we take into account the complexity of those elements which have resulted in the production of a text, there emerges the realisation that in order that it should be 'read' and understood at the deepest level, the writer's composition must be mirrored by the reader's interpretation and response. We assume that it is understood that, as well as the writer being bound into his or her own culture of production, so the child will bring a culture of his or her own to the text. The writing process will have involved the writer trying to cast him or herself in the role of reader as he or she seeks to distance him or herself from the text, and to predict the effect of his or her words upon the reader as he or she reads it. Given the importance of the context in which the text is experienced, we must consider to what extent the author is able to communicate what was intended.

We *assume* that the writer has taken into account as fully as possible the context into which his or her book will be received. We *assume* that he or she has fully taken into account what he or she hopes will be interpretation and response. We *assume* that the children's writer's intention is to produce a text which is 'good' for children. Evidence so far used, such as comments quoted from C.S.Lewis or William Golding, is embedded within these assumptions. But can we be sure that the writer has the intention of writing a book which is good for children? We have already seen that there is some doubt about Golding's

text having either been intended or suitable for the child reader, but when looking at writers' intentions, we must consider a much wider spectrum of literature. So far, we have assumed the integrity of the writer. Can we realistically do so?

We must remember that the writer's first consideration may be simply to write material which will be acceptable to a publisher. Having drafted and re-drafted the narrative until it satisfactorily seems to convey what was intended, the writer must then subject his or her composition to editing. If the publisher has in mind a given age group the writer might then be asked to revise his or her text several times in the light of requirements. If the publisher is searching for books written to a formula, then the writer will be pressurised to conform to that formula. Series such as the "Baby Sitters' Little Sisters" (28) are tightly controlled into uniformity. Can we therefore assume anything about the writer's intentions other than his or her willingness to confine his or her composition within such formula writing?

Bruno Bettelheim makes the worrying statement (29) that most children's literature is so shallow in substance that it doesn't contribute a great deal to the child's development, and that there is no point in learning to read if reading adds nothing of importance to the child's life. He also makes the point that bad literature cheats the child of what he ought to get, namely, access to deeper meaning. Would it be fair to assume that formula series, in fulfilling their role as scaffolding the child's decoding skills until he or she has a clearer knowledge of language, are adding something of importance to the child's life? If, as Bettelheim suggests, shallow texts cheat the child of meaning, might it not be that some readers are unaware of the

possibility of moving beyond those formula books, and therefore are cheated of the chance to read great literature?

To take further the examination of those elements which may contribute to the text as a finished product, once the book is published, it is subject to the critics. The author, unless it is a first novel, will already have been influenced by critics, and their criticism may or may not have been constructive. It is obvious that many writers find the experience a painful one, and one not without influence. Ivan Southall (30) reveals the depth of feeling on this subject;

"Beyond the writer, between him and the child, has grown a barbed wire entanglement through which his book, beating with his own blood, must thrust its way".

So far, we have discussed what is a 'good' children's book largely from the perspective of the possibilities and probabilities of its being understood by the child reader. The implications have pointed to the child reading it at the level of reading maturity which he or she has reached. This would imply that, either because the child's conceptual ability is restricted, or because his or her sensitivity to different dimensions has not been developed with and through other readers, he or she is insensitive to the deeper levels of meaning. Do we therefore assume that writers for children should not be subject to any of those elements which Southall might refer to in his phrase 'barbed wire entanglement'? Should the writer be subject to any restrictions?

In 'The Cool Web' a discussion between Catherine Storr and Julia McCrae (31) is concerned with one of Southall's novels; 'Finn's Folly'. This part of the discussion must, I think, be set against what Southall has to say about the restrictions to which his books are subjected.;

"Do you think there is a danger nowadays of the writer employing the sensational techniques of fear for fear's sake?...for the first time in many, many years when I finished the book I was afraid to turn out the light in my bedroom.

Catherine Storr....."what is the danger Julia?"

Julia MacRae. "The danger seemed to be to me that the issues were raised and so much fuel was thrown in that you were left with an unresolved fear, that a tension is built up and you are just frightened, but there is nothing to balance this."

Catherine Storr....."Yes. I think you're right....Oughtn't we to be able to resolve the fears that we raise in some way or other?...we ought to have some way of coping with it ourselves which we can put over...I found the book depressing, not frightening, but depressing.."

If the text enters the child's experience and becomes part of his or her experience of texts, or mental furniture which forms the criteria by which he or she learns to deal with given or unfamiliar situations, the point must be considered that, in reading such a text, it is possible that the child might be horrified or depressed, or be given models of behaviour, actions and reactions which could damage and confuse.

This must be particularly so if we believe Barbara Hardy (32) that narrative is a primary act of mind, and that the learning possibilities are so much greater as a result. If narratives do enter the child's experience more effectively than any other form of language learning, then we have the responsibility of using it to good effect rather than to increase his or her instability.

Bettelheim, as a practising Professor of Psychology, Psychiatry, and Education, presents a strong case for the definition of good narrative as that through which a child can sort out his or her existential problems. He suggests that a 'good' children's book should help the child make sense of life and of his or her position in it.(33) If, as Marian Whitehead says,(34) we are a created fiction, is it not so much

more important that children's books contribute in a positive way to the child's development as a person as well as to his or her literacy? If the reader's reaction to a text might be, as were Storr's and MacRae's (loc.cit.), either intense fear or depression, do we then regard such a text as being 'good' book, even while we acknowledge its literary merit?

This question of the basis on which a children's book should be judged is taken up by several writers in the essays which make up 'The Cool Web'. Joan Bodger Mercer (35) raises the issue of censorship with regard to the choosers of books for children, but deplores the censorship on the grounds that any form of censorship is done because of the challenge to authority. However, Bettelheim (36) insists that;

'(The reader) needs a moral education which subtly, by implication only, conveys to him the advantages of moral behaviour, not through abstract ethical concepts, but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him'.

Inevitable, at this point, the question of what is a good book for children becomes involved with what we talk of as 'morals'. It therefore becomes necessary to define more clearly what we mean.

R.F. Atkinson writes (37);

".. morality is a set of beliefs current in a society about character and conduct, about what people should try to be or try to do...Moral beliefs are a certain sort of belief about people and their actions."

When we look at moral issues within literature, it becomes clear that good texts fulfil those criteria which we have so far suggested as those by which a good book should be judged and that they are inextricably bound up with a concern about what people should try to be or try to do. Since the child is constantly learning possible modes of behaviour within society, as well as his or her position in it, we must

consider more seriously the part which books play in that learning process.

Harold Rosen (38) suggests strongly that ;

" every tale invites judgements and reasoning, and enfolded in its particularities are seductive invitations to penetrate its secret, to lure us into its values.....

The possibility that the young reader will assume the values of the writer whose work he or she reads gives the strongest of possible reasons for taking care that a proper concern for people is apparent in what we judge to be a book 'good' for children. As teacher/ arbiters, can we realistically assume that all children's writers seek to convey this concern for people? This is a serious question, and not one to be considered lightly.

Are there any circumstances in which the teacher should encourage the child to read books such as Southall's 'Finn's Folly' which raise fears with which he or she may be incapable of dealing?

John McCreesh, in his essay 'Children's Ideas of Horror and Tragedy' (39), discusses why children should be presented with fear, tragedy, horror, savagery, brutality and cruelty in their reading as a *solution* to problems that perturb them. McCreesh suggests that when children are faced with texts which contain the above elements, useful lessons can be learned by the reader. He develops this argument for presenting children with texts which contain such elements, acknowledging that since children are protected by their lack of maturity and understanding from the full horrors of tragedy, ways must be found to remove this protection, and to deepen the child's understanding of tragic consequences. Would mediation to deepen the child's understanding beyond the level of his or her development in this

sense be productive, or counter-productive?

It appears that the view put forward by McCreesh is based upon the psychoanalytical view of Freud, who said that the unconscious part of the mind is a powerful one, and that if the unconscious is repressed, then it may either take over the conscious mind, or the personality may be damaged by the struggle to repress it. If McCreesh's argument is taken to its logical conclusion, we are presented with the necessity of facing the child with those experiences of fear, sexuality and tragedy, in the hope that they may provide the catharsis by which the more bestial side of his or her nature may find release. Clearly, the complex nature of being human cannot be dealt with in such simplistic terms, nor could we realistically assume that through such texts, the children might more effectively develop a sense of themselves. As Robert Protherough (40) emphasises;

"The presentation of fiction in school is not just an academic exercise if the quality of narrative is intimately related to the quality of life. The ultimate importance of the fiction we read to children or put in their hands lies not in any moral it might convey, but in the fact that through it young people are helped to develop a sense of themselves, and of their shifting place in the world."

If such a sense of self is to be developed, then the text must provide some sort of code of action and thought which *helps* the child place and conduct him or herself within society. Through the text, the author should show possible patterns of thought and feeling which help the child to make an evaluation of that behaviour, and this should be embedded in language which is accessible to the child, both linguistically and developmentally. Within this development, if the book is 'good' enough, it would seem that the reader should be presented with characters who fit within his or her understanding of the world.

In a study of 'Children and Their Books', Whitehead (41) suggests that what is good literature for children can best be judged by asking the question,

'is this book one that we can imagine a responsible teacher justly recommending to pupils *at a certain stage of development* on the ground that they are likely to take from it some *imaginative experience valuable to them at their own level* over and above the mere practice of reading skills?' (my italics)

Clearly, this comment adds a new dimension to this argument. In it, there is the acknowledgement that what might be a good book for one child would not be good for another. As Catherine Storr (42) writes;

"Why is it that a child who can read the most bloodthirsty of the Grimm fairy stories without flinching, is reduced to a pulp of tears by Black Beauty and terrified by an illustration of a water nymph? Why can one child read ghost stories with impunity, while another can't even have the volume in the same room...?"

Thus emerges the difficulty of laying down any set of criteria by which children's books should be judged. The answer must be one of sensitive mediation, and within school, the responsibility for this mediation must lie with the teacher; a responsibility which presupposes certain given factors.

Any recommendations of any book to any child implies a history of decisions. A teacher may begin by objectively examining a text critically at the level of, perhaps, plot, characterisation, style, themes, relationships, language, but then begins the problem of being sensitive and attentive to the child's needs. This clearly presupposes a close relationship between each child and the teacher, both at the level of language development, personal development, aesthetic understanding, social development, likes, and dislikes.

As Robert Protherough (43) demonstrates, in real terms, there are teachers who are unable to deal with the problem of matching child to

book effectively, and indeed, many who are unaware of the problems. The language which is used becomes vague and misty. It is this mistiness which is, or should be, a major area of concern to those who are involved in education. The role of the teacher in this area is one which is complex and under researched. The notion of the teacher as mediator between the child and the text is an abstract one, yet while little is made explicit about how books should be taught, nonetheless, the media are concerned with frequent pronouncements on the results.

There are difficulties not only in deciding the scale of values needed to judge whether a book is a good book, but also in deciding which is the right book for the child *at that moment*, assuming that it might be available. This must be done in the knowledge that one could never be sure that the book which is offered will be accepted; it is the role of the teacher to recommend, and the right of the child to reject.

Thoughtful reflection must be a part of good teaching, but it is made in the knowledge that every minute of every day counts in the development of the child who is being taught, because where there are children, there are lessons being learned through either conscious or unconscious demonstrations. (What Frank Smith refers to as the timebomb in the classroom. (44)

Within the classroom this may mean mediating on a variety of levels, such as, choosing books for the school library, choosing books to be sold in the school bookshop, making decisions about which texts to choose for study, as well as learning the likes and dislikes of readers and assessing linguistic competence. It must also include those occasions when the teacher faces the moral dilemma of sexually explicit texts such as Judy Blume's 'Forever' (45) being circulated in the

playground to primary aged girls who are judged unready for such experience.

A further problem here, of course, is the diversity of what teachers would regard as good for children. McCreesh (46) speaks of teachers as 'us', so one assumes that he makes his decision on the basis of being a teacher. This points to the problem of degrees of responsibility, and to what extent we may assume that teachers are the best judges of what is good for the child.

However, the problems of defining a canon of 'good' children's literature without reference to the child, and his or her moral, social, aesthetic and personal development are such that we cannot avoid, as teachers, being involved in defining the criteria needed. Those texts which address one aspect of development at the cost of the others must be suspect. If the child is to be helped to make sense of his or her existence, then this is an area in which the teacher is in a unique position to be sensitive to the needs of the child in order that he or she might be helped as effectively as possible. This must include providing opportunities to engage with texts judged to explore and expose human nature, and which present the child with patterns of thought and language which will help him or her structure his or her world and explore his or her position in it.

If the text is to help the child make sense of his or her existence safely, then the teacher must try to be aware of which areas are disturbing to the child. If the text is to explore and expose human nature, then equally, the child must be capable of joining in the exploration. In order that his or her needs should be satisfied, the teacher is in a special position to decide on which terms he or she

needs to be 'matched' with the text.

This must be extended further, since a perfectly matched text would disempower the reader, and provide him or her with no challenge. The ideal must be to provide the child, therefore, with just the right amount of mismatch that takes the child forward and allows him or her space to develop learning as a result of interaction with the text. The subject of interaction is taken up more fully in the next chapter, when the implications of matching are analysed in the light of what happens when we give a child a book.

Before we try to conclude an exploration of what we regard as good children's literature, we must acknowledge fully the extent to which we have, in this chapter, regarded the text as an absolute from which all readers can obtain the same meaning if they are equipped with the correct skills and have reached the correct level of maturation.

We have sought to define children's texts as objects with particular histories of composition, production and status, and therefore consequent possibilities of meaning. We have examined the importance of contexts as possible contributors to understanding, and have analysed the writers' intentions as they write within their cultures and consequent conditioning.

From the perspective of the reader, we have discussed competence and familiarity with contexts as possible influences upon his or her view of the text, and have considered the issues of mediation. However, from this, and from the considerations of the child's development being potentially harmed or helped by the books he or she experiences, emerged the importance of the individuality of the child, and of interpretation and response. The term interpretation and that of response imply a

reader who is not a consumer, but in some measure, a producer of text. When we talk of such terms, we must do so in the knowledge that there must always be a mistiness of language when discussing subjective and meaningful concepts without taking into consideration either the subject (the reader) or the meaning (response and interpretation). One most important question which has not yet been satisfactorily addressed is, "What would the child regard as a good text?" and further to this, "Does the text invite response?"

This is such a key issue in this study, that it must be explored separately in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER TWO.

An examination of how we define response. Can we assume that the text invites response?

The notion of response is one which implies a two way process, a dynamic between what may be regarded as two constants. On the one hand, we have the text, which we have so far discussed as if it is static, and on the other hand we have the child as reader. The notion of text and the child as constant factors form the basis of the systems of graded reading in which one text follows chronologically upon the other, regardless of the reader as an individual. Book 2 of any reading scheme is likely to follow Book 1 on the basis of vocabulary and surface structure rather than on any consideration of response.

This common presumption of the reader as a consumer rather than a producer of text, and of the text as an absolute from which all readers can obtain the same meaning if they are equipped with the correct skills, may not be a sensible one. Such assumptions must be examined most carefully if we wish to explore fully the nature of the relationship between the child and the book.

That there can be a relationship is undoubted. This chapter is an exploration of the relationship between the two, and of the extent to which the text and the reader can be regarded as constants rather than variables within this process.

The first issue addressed is that of initial response to the book as an object. This leads to an exploration of the social nature of learning, and the difficulties inherent in measuring the child's

response as an individual. Following this, the child's reaction to what is written within the text is explored, and the possibility is introduced that the text may have no self-sufficient meaning without being subjected to that process of interpretation which we term 'response'. The complexities of measurement are analysed in the light of the continual changes involved, and an attempt is made to build a conceptual framework against which the relationship between the reader, the text and the writer may be viewed.

Further analysis reveals that the reader must be invited by the text if response is to be facilitated. This is supported by both theoretical data and empirical evidence gathered in the course of research. Response is explored initially at the level of the adolescent who has not been invited to situate herself within the text, then this is extended to examine the context in which the book is encountered and its effects upon the reader. The notion of the text *inviting* response is developed to reveal that the experience of responding effects some changes upon both the reader and the text, making the decoding process easier as a result. This is then illuminated by comments taken from both literary theory and research data.

Finally, an examination is made of the responses of those members of the Literature Group as relatively mature and experienced readers. The chapter ends with the conclusion that in examining response, we discover that the text is a dynamic which changes with each reader and with each reading.

In the last chapter, we sought to define 'text', and what we mean when we talk about a good children's text. One criterion raised by

Whitehead (1) was to subject the book to a teacher's critical judgement, and to use this as a yardstick for judging good literature. A conclusion which seemed to suggest itself, but which must be avoided, is that the role of the teacher is largely confined to mitigating the negative effects of poor texts, and highlighting the positive features in others. Such a simplistic view would reduce the teacher to the status of critic, and would confine the role as mediator to one of matching book to pupil in the narrowest sense.

If the text is regarded as a constant, and static, then the question of response, and of which text is given to which child, would seem to depend largely on the particular level of decoding skills which the child has reached, as well as his or her personal preferences. However, as was mentioned in the last chapter, the notion of matching book to pupil is much more complicated. To what extent could any teacher hope to match any text to the child's needs at any given point? We must surely accept that the teacher, even while using his or her knowledge of the pupil and of the text to set up meaningful focuses, could never have any degree of certainty of the success of any match. Indeed, we must ask ourselves, what would a perfect match be?

If the teacher takes into account the logical point of knowledge which the child has reached, and the significant psychological development; if he or she takes into account response as an individual as well as the social dimension of learning within the classroom; if he or she fulfils the demands of the curriculum, and then builds in his or her own evaluations of any text, could he or she be sure of creating a match that is as near perfect as possible? Even assuming that the child's cognitive development, emotional maturity, social interactions

had been assessed correctly, and matched with a text of just the right complexity of language and meaning, the result must surely be to leave the child no space for individual response. How would a reader respond to any text which was tailored to his or her needs so perfectly that it required no act of disambiguation, or which required no exploration? The notion of such matching denies the possibility of response in any real sense. What, then, do we mean by response? In what ways might response affect matching of book to pupil? Can we assume that response is crucial to the matching process?

Initial response must be examined in terms of the child's reaction to the book as an object. The first encounter must be with those physical features which attract or repel, which lure the child into picking up the book or leaving it on the shelf. In a recent talk to my pupils, Anne Fine, author of many of the books classed as 'favourites' in my classroom, demonstrated the extent to which initial response is dictated by the outward appearance of the book. Holding one of her books produced with an old fashioned cover, and the same book produced in a more modern style, she showed the group reaction of the listeners against the former. As she emphasised to the children, inside the cover, the pages were exactly the same, but her lightning poll done with one hundred and fifty children showed that all of them preferred the modern edition.

We cannot rely upon a cleverly contrived lightning poll as real evidence, but experience within the classroom very quickly reveals the tendency of children always to take the text which is least battered, the paperback in preference to the hardback, the most attractively presented book rather than the 'boring' looking one. A discussion

between Victoria and Erinn about the two editions of Anne Frank's diary (Tape 1 Side 1) suggests how much even the fluent reader may be influenced by such considerations ;

Erinn: "I've always wanted to read the diary of Anne Frank, and I see you've got the two editions up there, and I saw in the library that you've got the yellow edition. I didn't want to read it 'cause I didn't think it looked as good as the white edition 'cause....I don't know why.."

Victoria: "The yellow one looks really boring."

Me: " Why?"

Erinn "It's too thin and it's a hardback..probably..."

Victoria: "Oh, the drawing...the illustration's all brown and green and it doesn't catch your eye..and the yellow's a disgusting colour as well. I suppose that's just a matter of taste."

Victoria: "It looks a bit sort of...um..."

Erinn: "Washed."

Victoria: "It looks a bit...like...not close to you...it looks a bit..impersonal."

Despite knowing that the words inside the old hardback edition and the new softback are the same, neither Erinn nor Victoria are unable to avoid making value judgements on the basis of response to the book as an object. Can we therefore assume, as we are tempted to do, that every child will respond in the same way to the book's physical aspect? The answer must be a negative, though a qualified negative.

Response can be generalized at a social level, since the child within school is essentially a social being. We can assume that *all* children respond in some way to the book as an object, and we may even assume that *many* children respond in the same way to such features as hardback versus softback. However, response in real terms must leave space for the child whose reaction to the physical aspects of the book does not conform to generality. One such child is Antonia (Tape 1 Side 2) :

Antonia: " If it's an old book I like it, as I said last week. New books are not as nice 'cause they feel...it's not as if they've come from a different time to just....they're new, they're shiny, I don't like that very much....they're not worn.."

The old one has got a sense of having lived...other people have read it and felt it and smelt it...and they've seen things that you might not see, and they've experienced things from the text that you might not have experienced, and you can look at a book and think, someone read this before me and thought *this* and read *this*..."

Antonia's response is at a social level, but it is a vertically social response in that she sees herself as part of the society of readers stretching back through the history of the book's existence. It is part of what D.W.Harding writes about in his essay on *The Bond with the Author* (2):

Part of our own satisfaction is the sense that some other human being has found it satisfying to contemplate such and such possibilities and evaluate them in such and such a way, that when we share his satisfaction some mutual sanctioning of values is occurring and that we have this quasi-social relation with him even if he is dead or totally inaccessible.."

In becoming a member of that society of readers, Antonia assumes a oneness of response with those other readers who have gone before, implying a knowledge of others' reaction to what is written.

It may be that the different responses of these three girls are dictated by past experience of books as objects, or that response is largely dictated by character differences implicit within the nature of each, and influenced by that society of readers in which they move. Whichever assumption we make, the result must have substantial amounts of overlap, since the task of analysing response must, by its very nature, be an interrelation of each. In examining such an abstract concept as response, the child may begin by not knowing whether, when he or she goes to a bookshelf, he or she is more influenced by the physical aspects of the book itself, such as the look, feel, smell, size etc. or whether which book he or she approaches is dictated by his or her own personality, or influenced by the value judgements of peers. Erinn and

Victoria began by not knowing why either reacted against the hardback edition, and even towards the end of their discussion, they were not certain either of each other's responses or of their own, yet both remained adamant that one text did not attract either of them. If the response was dictated wholly by the text, then presumably each child would respond in exactly the same way (a sort of behaviourist account). If the child were to respond in terms of personal preference dictated by character, then the probability of many children responding in the same way would be minimised.

A further problem caused by the social nature of learning is that, in the course of discussion, it is difficult to ascertain whether the child is defining his or her own views with which he or she began, or is gradually assuming the views of others in the course of discussion. This must be particularly so in the case of reading, since learning to read is a social activity, and therefore all readers must have learned in the company of a more competent reader or readers.

When we try to measure response, one of the first problems that we encounter is that, in examining any psychological process, change is continual. As Vygotsky says (3),

any psychological process is one that changes before one's eyes. It is never possible to grasp the process in action. It must be studied as a dynamic, living process.

One way of dealing with this is to use the Vygotsky model of research, in which we follow the method called 'experimental-developmental'. This takes into account the premise that methods of measuring response, whatever they are, must be considered developmental, since the child develops response as a *result* of the process of responding to the experiment to which he or she is subjected. This is

particularly so in the case of the teacher-researcher, since any work done in the process of research must consciously have been planned to have teaching value for the pupil. It is only when we examine Vygotsky's notions that the complexity of the whole process becomes apparent, in that we are trying to define information which is constantly changing.

The reader changes as a result of the experience of reading. A further change may occur in the process of discussing that response. The teacher, as mediator, may influence response. The text may change. In Christopher Norris's introduction to Barthes' 'Extasies' (4), we read;

"One consequence of recent critical theory is the realisation that literary texts have no self-sufficient or autonomous meaning, no existence apart from their after-life of changing interpretations and values."

If this is shown to be the case, then the business of matching book to pupil, and of measuring response would be somewhat different. How do we begin to analyse the text in terms of the interpretation of each reader, or measure its self-sufficient meaning? In any such analysis or measurement, we cannot avoid using language which in itself requires an act of disambiguation. In either case, we are restricted to *describing* response, whether we use an analytical approach in which we attempt to separate out the elements of each text and each reader, or a synthetic approach, in which we take account of all the elements and attempt to draw them together into one cohesive whole.

In essence, what we are trying to measure is subject to so much development in the course of measurement, that it is almost impossible to come to any definite conclusions, and any definitive answer must be out of the question. All we can realistically hope to do is to find connections between the text and the reader.

In examining such processes, what we have been doing so far is to build up a conceptual framework, in other words, a working model or narrative version of the main dimensions. In the last chapter, we attempted to qualify some of the factors which may have influenced the writer, and the constraints within which he or she consciously operates. However, it must be remembered that any created text reflects processes which have happened as a result of the entire process of the writer's learning at every level, conscious and unconscious. The influences and learning of a lifetime must be so complex that any attempt at analysis of its processes can only hope to identify a few strands of the reality. The writer, as a key factor in the conceptual framework, is therefore seen to be a variable in the presumed relationship rather than a constant. Barthes illustrates this in his book, 'The Pleasure of the Text' (5);

'As a creator of text, the writer is always caught up in the war of fictions (jargons), but he is never anything but a plaything in it, since the language that constitutes him (writing) is always outside-of-place....The writer is always on the blindspot of systems, adrift...necessary to the meaning...but himself deprived of fixed meaning; his place, his (exchange) value, varies according to the movements of history.....He himself is outside exchange, plunged into non-profit...'

This is not necessarily a precise translation from French to English, yet any translation must be imprecise because so much of the language Barthes uses is ambiguous, and since the reader has to search for meaning, the words which can be translated in several ways are therefore subject to misinterpretation, or rather, to interpretation by each translator, particularly in the light of his or her different cultural background.

As he discusses the difficulties inherent within interpretation and

response, Barthes deepens the discussion by using language in a manner that stretches the limits of thought and reflection rather as does someone who, tuning a musical instrument effectively, must take it out of tune so that he or she may more easily return to the true note. He not only tells, but shows, that the writer is a product of his own restrictions, reticences, rhetoric and reflections; in fact, that he or she is disempowered in many ways by his or her own limitations. The writer him or herself would find it impossible to quantify or qualify those things which have influenced his or her writing, since much of it must be at the level of unconscious thought. Similarly, if response as a reader must match the input of the writer if interpretation is to be possible, we must assume that in many ways reader response must also be at the level of unconscious thought.

To extend this to include the child reader, it must be impossible to quantify the influences upon the child despite the fact that we, as adults, continue to regard the child as a constant when we use graded reading schemes and reading tests. Both the pre-school experience and the school experience are so personal that each child's must be unique. As Frank Smith (6) suggests so persuasively in his book, 'Understanding Reading', we can not ever be aware of which demonstrations have influenced the child's development, or caused him or her to draw the right or wrong conclusions, or indeed which unwitting demonstrations have been interpreted into modes of behaviour, and acted upon. In the light of this, we begin to catch a glimpse of why Vygotsky's experimental-developmental method is one which is difficult to follow, and also why the notion of matching is such a complicated one. How, then, do we measure response?

The initial method of measuring response to a text must be in listening to the child read. However, even at the point when the child picks up a text and reads the first few lines, it is important to remember that he or she must have first been armed with the skills which enable him or her to decode text, and the way in which these skills were acquired may have influenced his or her attitude to the act of reading. This is examined in the next chapter, but for the present it must be remembered that it must be taken into account as a contributory factor to response.

On listening to reading, it soon becomes apparent that the ability to decode surface structures is not sufficient evidence of response to text. If the child can read the words, then it does not automatically follow that he or she can read what is written. The child may read the words in a monotone, placing either no emphases anywhere, or placing them in such a way that the listener is very sure that the reader does not understand what he or she is reading. The voice does not rise to the key point in the sentence, and then fall. Key words are not emphasised. Punctuation is often ignored. The child is unable to put the text into his or her own words. Can we realistically say, therefore, that such a child is responding to a text in any way other than at the most basic level of saying the words printed before him or her? Would this be the logical conclusion of other listeners? If we listen to part of a discussion on Tape 1 Side 1, we see that this is so:

Erinn: We're reading 'The Midnight Fox' in class and some people didn't...they had a completely different idea to what it was about than I had and it really annoyed me."

Me: "How do you know?"

Erinn: "Well, it's just the way they read it..they um...they...oh, it's hard to describe....they don't put,,, they don't seem....they seem to read it as if it's words that are there to be read, whereas I, when I read it, I read it as a story...."

Antonia: "They think too much of what other people think of them. They don't like to put expression into what they say in case they get laughed at."

Me: "Yes..but it sounds as if they're putting the wrong expression in, with Erinn

Victoria: Nina has terrible trouble. She's getting worse, I think, with the reading out loud...She just can't...she can't speak...she can't say anything."

As we look at this passage, the difficulties in discussing response become clearer. My interpretation of Erinn's comment was about the ability to decode surface structure, whereas Antonia's response was about the reader responding to peer pressure. Because of my comment, we cannot be sure that Erinn was referring to the reader's inability to decode effectively. Victoria may be responding to what Erinn has said, when she goes on to comment on Nina's lack of fluency, or she may have adjusted her line of thought in response to my comment. How can we measure to what extent each person is responding with his or her own thoughts, or has been diverted by discussion to take on the views of another? Is it realistic to assume that such a variable is measurable?

In attempting to measure response to text, we must take into account the nature of the difference between written and familiar spoken language patterns. As Marion Whitehead said, (7) written language is language at its most highly wrought. Unlike spoken language, the author will have worked and reworked each word until it seems to convey as nearly as possible what he or she intends. Again referring to the talk given by Anne Fine, the author showed copies of her book at every stage, and at every stage up to the final draft, the text was full of scribblings out, reworked passages, words changed several times, sequential changes. Dialogue which seems natural has, in fact, been heavily contrived in order to move the story forward at every speech.

Natural, spoken language is, by contrast, full of hesitations, corrections, irrelevancies, interjections, interruptions, as well as being structured in less complicated patterns. Might this be one of the reasons why the reader has problems in making a text run smoothly as it is read aloud?

There is a further complication. If we return to the picture of the child as he or she takes up the book and reads the first few lines, we see that he or she is confronted with a text of written language, independent of his or her situation as a reader. Since, as Smith underlines (8), situation dependent language is the basis of children's language learning, the text must fit on to his or her conceptual framework of what he or she expects of a book, if it is to invite response. The use of familiar structures, such as story grammars, must invite the child to situate him or herself in the text, and provide, to some extent, a context within which he or she is able to respond .

We see, then, that familiarity is an important factor at the early stages of response. Why should this be so? Do we then assume that the child who cannot situate him or herself within the text fails due to lack of familiarity? Is this lack of familiarity with written language patterns? Is it because the author has not used story grammars with which the child is familiar? Has the child therefore no means of access to deeper levels of meaning within the text? Is this because this child simply never reads and therefore has a limited conceptual framework?

It would seem that there are no children who have any decoding skills who *never* read. The reluctant reader might only pick up what the teacher regards as 'a reading book' if pressurised to do so, but in other circumstances, this reluctant reader is happy to use those

decoding skills which he or she has acquired *if he or she is relatively familiar with the context and is therefore able to situate him or herself within the text*.. Does this mean that it is not necessarily lack of familiarity with the language structures which causes the child to fail, but lack of familiarity with the context, or situation? That being the case, once the situation was explained to the reader and made familiar, then the language patterns would no longer cause a problem. It is interesting here to look at an example from *Achieving Literacy* (9), a longitudinal study of adolescents learning to read.

In Chapter Seven, the teacher, Vicky, is talking to the pupil, Tracy, whose ideas of what readers do is 'vestigial'. They have just finished reading Jan Pienowski's 'Meg and Mog', and Vicky has decided that it was not a success. As a result of this, she gives Tracy a piece to read which had been dictated three weeks before by Tracy, describing a shopping expedition with her Mum. They go on from here, to write down another of Tracy's anecdotes, then read it back.

Vicky: Christmas is a nice long word with a big C.

Tracy: I always know - notice Christmas. I don't know why.

Vicky: Where do you see Christmas?

Tracy: I see it in cards. In shop windows when they say 'Come in and buy your Christmas cards'. And you see it on wrapping paper.'

What I want to show by this is that Tracy can read texts which touch her life in a meaningful way. This is *not* to say that she can read when she is motivated to do so. I feel that too much is made of motivation in reading. If Tracy were asked, 'Would you like to be the best reader in the class?' it would be very surprising if she said 'no'.

Frank Smith builds a strong case for this throughout 'Understanding Reading' (op.cit). Success is a reward in itself. People do not become failures because they want to become failures. When Tracy talks about

herself shopping, she presents herself in a positive light. It is something that she is familiar with and in which she can do well and therefore feels secure. Her success in reading the invitation to buy a card gives her a positive feeling about herself so that she is able, within the context of school, to remember how to read the words, even though the real situation has been removed, and the words of her anecdote are context dependant.

Motivation comes as a *result* of her success. She is aware that this is the kind of reading which she can do effectively. In her initial reading of the invitation, she admittedly responded because she was motivated by her need to buy Christmas cards, but if past experience showed her that once inside, she would present herself in a bad light, and be regarded as a failure, then the need to buy Christmas cards would not have been sufficient to motivate her into putting herself into a situation in which she could not operate effectively.

To extend this analogy, Tracy must have the motivation to go into the shop, she must also have personal knowledge that she can operate once she has entered, but she must also know that the shop is open to her before she would go in. Presumably, she would not enter a shop with darkened windows and a 'closed' sign in the window, even while this sign might be beside the invitation.

In the same way, the reader must be given positive feelings about him or herself in relation to the text in order that he or she might know that the invitation to situate him or herself within it is real, reliable, and meaningful.

If one inferred from the above example that motivation to read Meg and Mog was lacking, not because of a negative feeling that the

experience of the book engendered, but because an adolescent might not easily relate to this book written for such young children, this notion must be partially refuted by Tracy's enthusiasm about a book with which she has had success three months before, and which is written in a similar way (Ant and Bee and the ABC). Tracy knows the book is attractive, and knows that she can read it, therefore, its invitation to respond may be taken up because of her positive feelings about herself in relation to the text. This text is inviting because it has, in some way, given Tracy the ability to relate to it.

Later on in the session, when Tracy has been introduced to a new book (Old Mother Hubbard), Vicky mentions difficulties over unfamiliar words and says; '*Unless she is into the story, I can spot the 'unknown' minefield ahead.*' (My italics.) In some way, then, the teacher tacitly acknowledges that if Tracy has engaged with the text, then the unknown words cause less of a problem. Why should this be so? They are still unfamiliar, the surface structure has not changed in any way, yet apparently they become easier to read.

What I want to underline is that, in the words of Vygotsky (10):

"the child is accumulating experience which is changing the structure of his (or her) own memorising".

Tracy's teacher is surprised by the successful way in which Tracy reads Old Mother Hubbard, and assumes that this is partly because of having been familiar with the nursery rhyme heard long ago, though it must be taken into account that the words in Tracy's head still must be related to the marks on the page. For whatever reason, Tracy does not flounder over the difficult words. When she meets something unfamiliar she 'adjusts, self-corrects and charges on'. Is it that the text itself

has invited response? Is this why the words seem to become easier to read? Can we then persist in saying that the text has not changed, in the face of Vicky's experience that 'getting into the story' makes the task of reading easier?

This occurrence of the text becoming easier may be what Iser refers to when he says (11);

"The artistic elements of the author and the aesthetic elements of the reader confront one another, forming a dynamic literary work which must lie halfway between the two."

When Tracy brings her attention to the text, it changes in some way that is not evident to us except in a way that makes her reading more fluent and less fraught with pitfalls. She says repeatedly of 'Ant and Bee and the ABC' "I like it". Even so simple a text has invited her successfully to engage with it. "I like it" must surely mean the same as that which Barthes refers to when he says (12);

"The text you write must prove to me that it desires me".

Unless Tracy feels that the text desires her, she will not read it. Familiarity contributes, as does motivation, and the ability to decode surface structures, but it seems that the key to the relationship is in response. If response gives the reader a positive feeling about him or herself, then the process of reading in some way becomes easier.

How can we judge which text will invite the reader to respond? Could there be some sort of identifiable quality about such a text which encourages the reader to read? When discussing this, it is obviously very important to look at which texts give children a positive feeling about themselves. It seems that the way forward for Tracy would be to help her to create her own texts about situations which she has experienced, since this seems to contribute positively to her conceptual

framework of text. If each text she encounters obeys the 'rules' of her framework, then one presumes this building of experience of language would gradually give Tracy a positive feeling about what she might expect from a text, and what she might expect of herself in relation to it. If this feeling becomes positive, then this, in turn, might enable her to 'get into' books, which would further affect her ability to respond. If, as author, she could come back to the text as a reader, then the significance of her knowledge of the context in which such a text was written, and the context into which it was received must surely make a positive contribution to her response. While using her own text would not imply her being in a privileged position over any other *competent* readers, the suggestions are strong that it would give Tracy a privileged position in response to her own text and help to build up that framework which would support her in the process of reading. As Bruner demonstrates(13), the reader needs a scaffolding of support as he or she builds.

This need for scaffolding must be so at any level of reading. In the process of teaching texts to many successive year groups, it becomes possible to see generalized patterns of reading, and to be aware that different texts invite response at different levels. While texts which provide strong scaffolding or support invite the reader whose conceptual framework is limited, those texts which are layered with complexity invite only the most fluent reader and give much less support. Those which appear to do all the work for the reader are chosen occasionally by the competent reader, but repeatedly by the less confident one. These are those children which Donald Fry (14) refers to as being still at Base One in their reading. They have learned to decode surface structure

*if the text helps them.* As can be seen with Tracy, difficult words are insurmountable only if the reader is not 'into' the story.

Keeping in mind the dynamic flow of the whole process, we must search further for connections between the text and response. If readers can decode most effectively *when the text helps them*, then it is obviously important to discover *which* texts invite *which* readers to respond.

We have already examined some criteria by which we judge a 'good book'. However, since we are talking about books for children, it seems important to take into account the child's view of what is a good book.

When a class of twenty-three eight year old girls were asked to list their favourite ten books in July 1990, Dahl's books were cited fifty six times, and Enid Blyton's books were cited twenty one times despite not being included on the bookshelves at school. These numbers should be viewed against the others (Context Chart 1) where such books as the Narnia series are only mentioned sixteen times despite being currently shown on television, and also being the class reader. Books which adults would judge as classics, such as Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie, Wind in the Willows, by Kenneth Graham and Grimms' Fairy Tales each have only one mention.

It is, therefore, obvious that books by Blyton and Dahl invite response, particularly in those children who have problems with reading. In Donald Fry's 'Children Talk About Books' (15), he found that Karnail, a little boy who could not read fluently (first year senior) could engage with a Blyton text better than another.

"I do not believe that Karnail was reluctant to read, it was rather that books resisted him."

Karnail could and did enjoy books in the 'Secret Seven Series' by Enid Blyton.

To what extent, then, may we safely ignore the opinions of children when trying to decide what is a good book, and also when trying to measure response? In the face of such popularity, it would be obvious to all but the most biased that at some level, Blyton and Dahl are very good indeed at luring the reader into reading and responding enthusiastically. An examination of the level at which they are working for the reader is obviously necessary.

Within books by Dahl and Blyton, the characters are so clearly marked into those who are good and those who are bad, with no grey area of those who are a mixture, that the reader is cast into a passive role. As Nicholas Tucker emphasises in his study of 'The Child and the Book' (16):

"Younger children will not welcome ambiguity in their literature. The type of moral judgement they can most easily share and understand will tend to praise or condemn characters for their surface acts alone, without wanting to consider more subtle explanations, either in terms of motivation or else in the suggestion of an altogether more complex scale of values."

Blyton texts particularly fulfil this criterion of lack of ambiguity. Very little is demanded of the reader because the text is made very explicit.

Frank Smith (17) reveals just some of the ways in which 'The Secret Seven Series' by Blyton help less able readers to respond positively to the text, namely, same format, same covers, list of contents, drawings of characters opposite the first page. Each book starts on page seven and ends on page ninety six. The back cover gives a reliable synopsis, the last paragraph of the chapter is recapitulated in the next, key

words such as 'badge' are repeated a great deal, and the narrator writes from the viewpoint of the children so that there is no disparity of vision.

This last point is also true of Dahl. As can be heard on Tape 2 Side 1 the same girls who gave their favourite books in July 1990 can be heard discussing Dahl in February 1993. The point is made that Dahl writes as if he were a child, in other words, there is no disparity of vision. He cleverly manipulates the child-reader as, on the first page of 'Matilda', he talks about what 'disgusting little blisters' some children are, but then invites the reader to join him in his feelings about them. As Erinn and Victoria commented in a Literature Group meeting, the words that he invites the reader to shout with him are like a jingle and invite repetition- "Bring us a basin! We're going to be sick".

In 'Matilda', we see the world from the diminutive perspective of a five year old. Matilda, although a child, has managed to achieve more intelligence and maturity than the childish adults around her, and the child reader obviously enjoys this feeling of superiority.

Emma, while in Year 6 in 1990-1991, wrote, in a book review:

"Matilda is about a girl called Matilda and when she is born, her parents don't take any notice of her. At the age of one she taught herself how to speak and know a lot of grown up words. When she was three she was able to read".

This enjoyment of Matilda's superiority is obviously one of the things which Emma most relishes in this book. It seems to invite her to share in Matilda's triumph. This wish fulfilment of power over adults is taken further by Dahl, in his use of magical powers over inanimate objects coming to Matilda's aid against the wicked adults. This fulfils

what Bettelheim (18) sees as the basic need of the child.

"Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding good life is within one's reach, despite adversity - but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed."

Emma, whose listed top ten books were all by Dahl, wrote about her favourite book, 'Boy':

"Boy goes through all of Roald Dahl childhood and all of the noty and secret things he did wile at school. He was just like most boys of his age and liked to do noty things the things he used to do were amasing. And if you did anything silly you got the cane on the spot! He tell you of how he put a mose in a sweet jar. I hope if you read it you will enjoy it as much as me."

That Emma has enjoyed Dahl's texts must be underlined by her choosing only those texts as favourites. That she is able to situate herself in the text is evident by her changing from 'he' to 'you' when talking about Dahl's childhood. She has become involved to the extent that she feels that she is able to make an authoritative statement about schooling at this time. Her last sentence reveals quite an intense pleasure in her reading of 'Boy', even though Emma does not relate easily to texts, and 'Boy' is written in complicated language patterns. This intense pleasure in the text is not easy to define. Barthes (19) says,

"No thesis on the pleasure of the text is possible; barely an inspection (an introspection) that falls short."

While we may not be able to give the pleasure of a Dahl text definition, we nonetheless cannot avoid its existence.

To recapitulate, it is assumed that Dahl's and Blyton's books do not work at any level which could sustain discussion in psychological terms at any length. The characters are shallow. The text is not open to

interpretation at any deep level. However, they hold the reader's attention, there is no disparity of vision, and children judge them to be good books, while adults often do not. Do we assume that these texts are read because they fit neatly into the child's conceptual framework of what a book is and of his or her relation to it, or do we simply assume that children read such books for escapism, and therefore are willing to overcome difficulties within the text because of being drawn into the narrative? Dahl, and particularly Blyton are attractive in that they are able to create a familiar world which lives beyond the book, and this seems to be an important part of an inviting book. Blyton, particularly, must have turned generations of children into readers partly because of the prolific nature of her writing and possibly because her writing is so safe and predictable that the child has easy access to reward for reading. However, if we look at the criteria which Bettelheim (20) puts forward in his views on the psychological relevance of good literature we are aware of the disparity between fairytales as fulfilling the needs of the child, and a Blyton or Dahl text;

"In order to master the psychological problems of growing up, overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries, becoming able to relinquish childhood dependancies, gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self worth, and a sense of moral obligation - a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious."

'Good' books do not just work at the level of escapism, but also answer a deep need in humans, in that experience can be built up vicariously, while the child reflects and makes judgements on the basis of what is virtually his or her own experience. The use of animistic thinking is ideally suited to the child who has not reached puberty, and who therefore thinks, behaves and acts on animistic principles. Their

strong delineation of gender roles helps the child to develop masculine or feminine identity at an age when these can easily be shaken. The repeated resolution of existential problems which all humans face, such as those listed above, give the child the feeling that he or she can overcome adversity and reach fulfilment.

If we recognise the value of escapist fiction as working at the levels at which they were consciously written, then the positive contribution which can be made to response is great. The reader is invited, even lured into the story, and is able to enjoy it at the level of narrative. Such fiction therefore has great value as texts which are so accessible, and do so much of the work for the reader that they overcome many children's difficulties in reading by involving them in the story to the extent that they are able to situate themselves in the text and leave it feeling that the experience has given them such a positive feeling that they very quickly begin another book by the same author.

It must be taken into account that any reader reads for many different purposes, and on many different levels. Barthes says(21);

"We do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the integrity of the text;

If the reader who does not feel secure in his or her ability to respond to the text can read a Dahl or a Blyton book with pleasure, and can respond at the level of enjoyment as a reader, then surely this must be regarded as more valuable than an encounter with a text which requires more intensity of reading, and therefore which would leave the less able reader working at frustration level. Dahl and Blyton use techniques which effectively reduce the confusion of the reader, and

increase comprehension, thereby giving the positive self-image which is so important to response.

What of the fluent reader who is confident in his or her ability to engage with the text? At the level of story, Dahl's books are enjoyed by such a reader, but it is noticeable that the body of literature which makes up the favourites of such readers is written at a different level. It would seem that, having developed fluency, *then* part of the enjoyment of the text is in being able to increase intensity of reading, and to practise those skills which have come as a *result* of response. As Barthes explains (22):

"Whence two systems of reading: one goes straight to the articulations of the anecdote, it considers the extent of the text, ignores the play of language...the other skips nothing; it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport..."

As Barthes writes, through one system, the pleasure of the text is in the enjoyment of the narration - what Lewis (23) refers to as the 'sheer narrative lust' - which drives the reader onwards across space and time; through the other, the pleasure is in the deliberate examination of every word, every nuance, as each layer of significance is peeled away as by an expert in dissection.

This may provide the answer to why the more confident reader is not put off if comprehension is not immediate. The lure of the more complicated text is not in its transparency, but in its cryptic quality. When talking about response Erinn and Victoria agree that uncertainty is desirable in that it "adds to the mystery and builds up the suspense". (Tape 1 Side 1).

Victoria: ...I think you should feel flattered if the author lets you...like in 'The Owl Service, what Alan Garner is doing is...he's...mmm..letting them think what's happening themselves. He never actually tells you what's happening at the end...he leaves you

to make up your own mind..he leaves it not with solid doubt...He doesn't...he doesn't lead you up to a brick wall and then stop dead, he brings you up to a sort of misty brick wall where you can sort of...you can part the mist and everything...you have to do it yourself.

Uncertainty is deliberately maintained in 'The Owl Service' (24), to the extent that, for the first fourteen pages, there is no indication of who the characters are, or what relationship they have with each other.

We are first presented with Gwyn, whose youth is made apparent by his mention of school, and Alison, who also seems to be a teenager. At page six, we are given a totally different scene and a different character, Roger, sitting in a meadow in the sunshine. We are given no information about him. After six sentences, we read;

"Something flew by him, a blink of dark on the leaves. It was heavy, and fast and struck hard. He felt the vibration through the rock and he heard a scream.  
Roger was on his feet, hands wide, but the meadow was empty and the scream was gone."

What is the reader to make of this? We have already pointed out the uncertainty which the reader must tolerate with regard to the characters and relationships in this book, but Garner goes on to demand even more of the reader who, at this stage, must be trying to make sense of the text. The experienced reader searches for something in his mind that can fly hard and fast, and which is heavy. It should be something likely to be found in a meadow. It hits the rock with such force that it creates a vibration. We begin to realize that it must have been something very heavy indeed, or something that was moving with incredible speed. If it was a bird, the impact must have killed it. There was no corpse of a bird at his feet. Is it a bird that can scream, such as an eagle? Was the scream one of pain? Was the bird hurt? Could it fly away after hitting a rock so that it vibrated?

Garner deliberately asks questions which, for the moment, are unanswerable. The reader is expected to supply much of the substance of the text if he or she is to move from the state of confusion to comprehension. In order to make sense of this text, the reader must bring his or her own experience to it at a very sophisticated level, moving from the literal to the inferential, and even then being left in a state of uncertainty.

At surface level the thing which flies by him *could be* a bird, a bullet, another rock, in fact anything that is heavy and is capable of either flying or being hurled. The blink of dark *could be* a literal shadow, a premonition, a suggestion of evil. The summer stillness becomes a threatening, tense stillness, yet if we look at what has actually happened to Roger, we see that he has seen a shadow, felt a vibration and heard a scream. The complexity of our reaction increases as we try to supply answers at an increasingly deep level.

Vygotsky (25) says that

complexity of response is said to increase with an increasing number of stimuli. An essential presumption in this line of thinking is that the complexity of the task is identical to the complexity of the subject's internal response.

If we look at this from the other direction, then we can assume that the complexity of the subject's internal response is equal to the complexity of the stimuli.

At a personal level, I am at a loss to account for my own response, in that this is the only children's book which I find so horrific that I have never been able to finish it, nor have I been able to use it in class for the same reason. One can analyse the fear in the knowledge that one's mind is stimulated by knowledge of the supernatural, of links

in literature between birds and evil, of connections between darkness and evil, of fear of violent phenomena, but these cannot account for an unreasoning fear of what is, after all, a fiction for children. The most obvious answer is that the fear lies within the subconscious, and that, therefore, not only conscious levels of response are being brought to bear, but also those over which we have no control and little knowledge. However, if we look at the Vygotsky model, the complexity of the stimuli is that which is causing the complexity of response.

This implies that the reasonably uncomplicated surface structure is only a tiny part of what is actually written, given that response is so complex. About its composition, Garner writes(26):

"Like all the books so far, *The Owl Service* contains elements of fantasy, drawing on non-classical mythological themes. This is because the elements of myth work deeply and are powerful tools. Myth is not entertainment, but rather the crystallization of experience, and far from being escapist literature, fantasy is an intensification of reality.....Welsh political and economic history; Welsh law; these were the main areas of research. Nothing may show in the book, but I feel compelled to know everything before I can move. This is a weakness, not a strength.....I learned Welsh in order not to use it..."

It seems that what Garner regards as a weakness is a strength because, in some way that is not apparent, I feel that I am aware of what he has not written into the text, yet what was in his mind when he wrote it. It is too simplistic to say that deep research results in a novel with depth, yet the layers of his research into Welsh myth, the Welsh language and through that his exploration of the Welsh personality, are there adding to the book's complexity. Another adult reader, Philippa Pearce, writes (27);

"This is partly a *roman à clef* and, properly to understand what is going on, the reader needs every aid:..... Even with these, the narrative power of the book may be the undoing of the susceptible reader, hurrying him on in headlong excitement towards a total of mental confusion....My repeated objection...is not that young

readers (and adults too for that matter) may understand too much, but that they are likely to understand too little".

The complexity of Philippa Pearce's response, and of mine, shows that, if Vygotsky's equation is correct, the text is similarly complicated. Can one therefore assume that we, as readers of the same text, are reacting to the same stimuli?

It may be that other readers have responded in the same way but even supposing that another reader might have the same fear of the book, one could not assume that those fears are rooted in the same stimuli. Again, as Vygotsky underlines, although two types of activity can have the same external manifestation, their nature may differ profoundly. Any description of external responses must be made in the knowledge that they may not be indicative of the same inner feelings. We cannot assume that the text that I have read is the same as that which confused Philippa Pearce. If we were both to try to reproduce the text from memory, there is nothing so certain as that it would differ in many respects, even though we had both started with identical texts. Nor can we assume that the same text would raise the same fears or confusions in the child, particularly if we assume that it is because of the greater level of experience that the adult brings to the text which enables more awareness of deeper levels of meaning in the text.

When the question of whether the text is static was put to the three girls in the literature group, their answers were emphatically 'no'.

This discussion can be heard on Tape 1 Side 1.

Erinn: "I don't even think that half the text is there."

Antonia: "The text is what you want to make it."

Erinn: It's like clay that you can mould into any shape you like. Clay is like a block, like a book and then it's however the reader wants to mould it. If people leave it like a block, say Nina, she'd leave it like a block...but us ...I'm sure would definitely mould it

into our own...whatever we want."

The basic task of research is therefore an attempt to build a reconstruction of the process of response, and using Erinn's simile, we must examine the shape of the text which has been made. Dahl supplies many clues. One assumes, therefore, that the clay is already pre-moulded by Dahl, so that the reader has to do less work, and the shape of the text will be more uniform. Garner has supplied so few clues that Philippa Pearce is not certain of what shape she has been left with. For me, he has suggested a shape grotesquely rooted in myth and magic. As can be heard on Tape 1 Side 1, Erinn and Victoria read 'The Owl Service' at a level which neither confused too much, nor frightened too much. Such diversity of reaction corroborates Barthes' insistence on the creative element in reading. If the text invites response, then the reader becomes almost part of the that text. As Antonia says on Tape 1 Side 2:

"I feel as if I'm in the book. Just a bystander while someone's talking to you, narrating, and you're watching."

Me: "You're not one of the main characters?"

Antonia: "No."

Me: " But you're actually in it?".....

Antonia: " It's like a play. What's happening is on the stage and you're in the audience watching and someone is sitting beside you or on the stage narrating it, telling you what's happening... And every now and then .....(word unclear) out just to say something ...Mmm ...the stage is all lit up sort of ...er...square stage and everything else around it is black, and you're watching it happening..."

The creative element does not separate the reader from the text, but from the rest of the world around her. While Antonia is reading, the happenings within the text are lit up and central while everything else round is black. The reader and the text become one, and into that oneness is brought the writer:

"On the stage of the text, no footlights: there is not, behind the

text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and an object. The text supersedes grammatical attitudes; it is the undifferentiated eye..."

It seems then that we have discovered, like Barthes (28), or are in the process of discovering, that response is a dynamic between two dynamics. On the one hand, we have the reader who may change with every reading, and on the other the text, which may change with every reading and every reader. Involved in this is the writer, whose experience can be neither quantified nor qualified. All of these, in some nebulous way that is so difficult to define, become one. The result is what we call response.

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### CHAPTER THREE.

An exploration of how we seek to define 'a reader' in terms of schooled literacy and of the extent to which the teacher's perceptions influence the child's response to text.

In the last chapters, several axioms which could be regarded as fundamental in the conceptual framework of the child as reader and responder to texts were presented. Those were that the good reader should be able to decode texts and create meaning through his or her response, should also be able to situate him or herself in the text, must feel its invitation to do so, and be capable of a response that changes as a result of what the reader brings of him or herself to the text. It was further proposed that the process of reading changes and develops, so that what we are attempting to define is dynamic, as is the text and the reader. It was concluded that each reader, to a greater or lesser extent, responds differently to each text and creates from it a different shape, and that this shape is refined with each subsequent reading. In the light of this we now need to focus upon how the child has achieved his or her identity as a reader, and to what extent classroom practice has influenced the reader as a created entity.

In this chapter, the central concern is what we regard as schooled literacy, and of how we seek to define and produce a reader in terms of classroom practice. The importance of the intentional dimensions of what is regarded as the 'shared' view of the reader is explored. An overview of educational practice and a general examination of those beliefs is given, to show how such beliefs have influenced particular practices, and how they are realized in specific targets which involve assessment of the reader at key stages of development. Implicit within this system

is the notion of a 'standardized' level of literacy achievable by those of a specific chronological age.

In order to simplify what we regard as schooled literacy, the image is used of the reader being taught by being led up one of two staircases, one of the primacy of text and the other of the primacy of reader with a consideration of all that is implied by that division. This analogy is extended throughout the chapter, and provides the framework for the discussion about teaching and the influence of particular practices upon the child.

Inherent within this is the belief that how we view the 'reader' must heavily influence decisions about methods of teaching reading. What emerges is that although many would not go so far as to suggest that the child should *not* be taught skills, the importance which is attached to the acquisition of this technology may affect the 'reader' in ways that are, as yet, not fully appreciated. While acknowledging that all teachers have a concern that the reader learns to make texts meaningful, the point is made that the emphasis which the teacher gives to each element necessary to this process constantly fuels the debate about reading, and increases the lack of clarity in policies and practices.

The final section deals with the specifically social nature of human learning and of the importance of collaboration. The crucial importance of the match between the social support system and the process of learning to read is underlined. This leads us into an exploration of the nature of that support system and its implications in terms of response in Chapter Four.

When we discuss what is regarded as schooled literacy, we find that the issue has been clouded by frequent and often untheoretical pronouncements. An overview of schooled literacy would imply that standards have steadily fallen since the inception of universal education. In 1861, a Government appointed Commission reported that school standards were too low; in 1943, the Norwood Report pointed to falling standards in English and blamed the schools; in 1969 the first Black Paper complained of falling standards in reading; in 1992, NFER recorded an average national decline of between 2.5 and 3 months in the reading ability of seven to eight year olds. In that same year, the Alexander Report (1) stated that;

"...sources provide some evidence of downward trends in important aspects of literacy and numeracy...primary schools must get their policies and practices right for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. These findings add urgency to the need to confront questions about classroom practice..."

So the debate goes on with degrees of urgency that fluctuate according to interest. At the final revision of this thesis, August 26th 1993, The Secretary of State for Education, Mr. Patten, was broadcast (2) saying that we must solve the problem of illiteracy, since we have 'far too many illiterates' in this country. He commented forcefully upon the need for 'absolute standards' by which the children could be judged. We see, then, that the current position still seems to support the belief that reading can be reliably tested by 'absolute standards' and turned into statistical evidence on the basis of which policies and practices are developed in order to remedy the problem of the poor reader.

This is currently supported by the recent developments in National Curriculum testing which place the child at a numerical score level

which he or she is seen to have achieved on the given day of testing. Many reading tests also give the child a numerical score, e.g. The Holborn Reading Scale, or Daniels and Diack Reading Tests. Reading schemes such as Ginn and Ladybird are graded according to difficulty of surface structure. Methods of reading may advocate counting and analysing the number of errors which the child makes and base a plan of mediation upon the diagnosis. e.g. Marie Clay's Reading Recovery Programme(3), and while this, in itself, does not imply a numerical approach, data gathered from such assessments may be used to compare standards. In the light of a century's apparent failure to improve standards of reading, we must examine exactly what is implied by evidence that is calibrated in numbers. Can such data be regarded as valid?

Quantitative evidence always suggests that the concept of the reader is one which can be frozen at any given point, and implicit within this are various underlying assumptions. One is that the reader responds in a constantly predictable manner and that the meaning is to be found in the text. As we discovered in the last chapter, this may be a false premise. Another is that 'standard' attainment targets are derived from a norm based upon a linear development that in some way runs parallel to chronological age. An assumption which underlies this is that if the teacher is doing his or her job properly, the reader will have been stimulated and pushed forward along this line at each testing. Margaret Meek (4) points to the dangers of this;

"Here lies the crucial difficulty. No language process develops in a linear fashion, incrementally, step by step...speaking, listening, writing and reading develop recursively, in a spiral."

Meek goes on to qualify this, emphasising that progress is not

straightforward, and that in the spiral analogy, the development is not only spiralling, but also dipping at some spirals. If this is so, then the child who is progressing as a reader will not show improvement at each stage of testing. On the contrary, some results must necessarily show what appears to be a regression as the child travels over old ground in order to assimilate the new.

Quantitative evidence also suggests that every reading requires a specific response, and that the meaning being derived from the text is shared by the tester. If what we have discovered about response in the last chapter is true, then how can we fix response in this way? Even assuming that the tester responds sensitively to the child, he or she is confined within guidelines of *which* responses might be considered acceptable in the light of the decisions of those who have written the tests.

If quantitative evidence is more damaging than constructive, as we hope to prove in the course of this chapter, it is important, at this stage, to examine the extent to which teachers are encouraged to test quantitatively.

The concept of the reader as delineated by the Kingman Committee, in 1988, supplied the basic premise of what might be expected of a schooled literacy programme (5):

The development of the ability to read, understand and respond to all types of writing, as well as the development of information retrieval strategies for the purpose of study.'

Such a statement suggests a concern for qualitative rather than quantitative development. One could assume, therefore, that current tests focus upon the quality of each child's response. If we examine the most recent, i.e. the Pilot Tests issued for Key Stage Two testing,

Levels 3-5 test (6), we see that some effort has been made to do so. The targets set for the reader are:

*'reading an increasingly wide range of texts', 'developing and expressing personal taste', 'talking and writing about plot', 'referring to relevant passages to support response', 'draw conclusions and predict and make judgements', 'appreciating the imaginative uses of English'.*

Can we assume, therefore, that each teacher administering these tests will interpret them as having a major concern with qualitative judgements? The first difficulty that we encounter must be that the outcome of the test is a 'Statement of Attainment' record in which the teacher must 'circle the number in the box' if the child is judged to have responded correctly. This confines the teacher's response to the child within immediate terms of pass or fail, and must imply to the teacher the quantitative bias in the task.

The next problem is that every phrase *could* be interpreted as concerning qualitative judgements, until we come to the last, which must give pause for thought. This last phrase rather implies that the former concern themselves with something other than imaginative texts, in other words, authoritative texts as opposed to those which need interpretation.

What I want to demonstrate by a further examination of these Pilot Tests is that *it is possible* to interpret them as having a bias towards structural analysis, suggesting that they lend themselves to quantitative measurement of performance skills. If they are used less for diagnostic purposes than as measuring instruments of success or failure, then this must lend support to such a view. There is an underlying tension between assessment for diagnostic purposes and assessment for the purpose of producing league tables which, in turn,

influence new policies, and this tension must realize itself in the way pupils are taught. In examining the procedures of testing, it is important that we do not lose sight of the child, and of what such testing does to his or her perceptions, as well as society's perceptions, of the reading process. As Margaret Meek points out (7) :

"..children learn what counts as literacy in the place where they are expected to learn it. It is crucial, therefore, that teachers, parents and children know and discuss what they believe are the important reading and writing lessons."

One excellent result of recent developments in education is the increasing openness, and the way in which parents have been allowed access to information, both personal and general, about what is being taught and how their children have responded. However, this increases rather than decreases the need for clarity and soundness in the definitions and exemplifications of 'schooled' literacy, particularly in view of the tension which lies between the primacy of reader and primacy of text debate.

An examination of the Key Stage Two Pilot higher level of testing (at Level 6) reveals that this tension is embedded within this text itself, and within the possibilities of its interpretation. If we read the framework of learning required for Level 6 testing, we see that again the emphasis upon information retrieval and analysis of surface structures suggests that the answers are there in the text, to be responded to correctly or incorrectly. The higher level skills (8) listed are;

*reading a wide variety of texts, such as autobiography, diaries, letters, and pre-twentieth century texts; using a range of information texts such as fact finding, identification of key points and getting the gist of a passage; use of media texts and other texts not specifically written for young readers; synthesising information from different sources; discussion of vocabulary change*

*and the introduction and coinage of new items of vocabulary.*

Interpretation cannot be neutral. Since the intentional possibilities must be made concrete, must be realized in specific teaching methods, they must affect specific content of teaching as teachers strive towards good practice. If these skills are seen in terms of information retrieval, we must not only acknowledge how much this must change teaching methods, but look at the much more fundamental question of the extent to which the test results are valid in terms of what we have learned about the child and the text.

At this stage, it becomes obvious that, as readers of this text, we have, in effect, the same need for disambiguation as has the child confronted with a text in school. Can we assume primacy of text, in other words that the meaning is in *this* text and, as readers, all who turn it into policy and practice are deriving the same meaning? In the process of examination we see illustrated the underlying problems of the primacy of text approach.

There is a further complication which must be noted and borne in mind as an underlying influence, not upon practice, for we have no reason for assuming that practice takes this into account, but upon the product of the reader. The complication is that, if we dig beneath the surface, there is the suggestion that information can only truly be gathered through the responsive, reading for meaning approach. Since this is a complex notion, we must examine it more fully before we properly approach the primacy of reader/primacy of text debate.

Most readers would agree that the Key Stage Pilot Tests are authoritative texts and, as Bakhtin points out (9);

"The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might

have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it...it demands our unconditional allegiance."

As Bakhtin goes on to show, this is not fully possible. Does not interpreting the text necessarily imply using judgement? Can we read information without responding in a personal way? Frank Smith defines information as follows (10):

"Information may be regarded as the reduction of uncertainty concerning the alternatives among which a reader must decide."

If this is the case, then making a decision implies a judgement. Using judgement implies response and interpretation in the light of experience. If, as we discovered in the last chapter, the text changes with the reader's interpretation, can we really assume that this does not apply to authoritative texts?. Bakhtin later says (11):

"The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention,...when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.."

What this demonstrates is that an authoritative text is still helplessly and irremediably bound within interpretation. My interpretation of the Pilot Tests is that they give an over-emphasis to information retrieval, thereby suggesting a technology-of-skills based literacy. Another reader may argue with such an interpretation but, providing each reader can support his or her interpretation, no one reader has authority over the rest. As was discovered in the last chapter, even the writer cannot claim this authority since the point at which the text becomes public is the point at which he or she must lose that authority.

The way in which this particular text is interpreted must greatly affect the way the child is taught to read; firstly, in the way that the

school interprets what is required, then in the way that this is turned into policy within each institution, then in the way that it is turned into practice within the classroom. If, as teachers, we give an over emphasis to analysis of structure for information retrieval, *even though we might acknowledge that it is impossible to analyse without using a response which draws upon our personal store of knowledge about language*, we imply that the meaning is in the text, and that therefore, he or she may only use his or her response in terms of trying to find the same meaning as the next person. If we give an emphasis to response, then we imply to the child that he or she as a reader is the authority upon the text, that his or her interpretation is as valid as the next, if he or she can support such responses.

In order to simplify, and to show the importance of such a division in the classroom, we might use the model of two staircases. The teacher who takes the child up the staircase of primacy of text will embrace methods that have as their goal being able to derive meaning from the text through developing the ability to decode surface structure. In this case, the end product will be a reader who is 'strictly defined by the lexical and syntactic organization of the text' (12). The meaning is there in the text, waiting for the reader who, equipped with appropriate reading skills, will be able, as will any other readers, to reconstruct the author's meaning. This centres on the assumption that the text is static, and that the child's attempts at reading it are either right or wrong.

The teacher who takes the child up the primacy of reader staircase will use methods which approach the structures of the text through meaning. This aspect of reader-response theory stresses the activities

of the reader as being of paramount importance in the interpretation of what is written. It may lessen the role of the teacher as the authority on the text. It may involve allowing the child interpretative space to create the dynamic text which lies halfway between what has been written and the reader. It must allow for interpretation through drawing upon those codes which are embedded in language and textual conventions. Because it is recognised that each text is reconstructed by the reader, this gives the child more freedom of interpretation, and reduces the possibility of being wrong or of being right. In all cases, what matters is what the reader brings of him or herself to the text, and the processes through which he or she achieves meaning. The linguistic structure of language is perceived as important only insofar as it makes obvious the intentional possibilities of the writer.

Having listed what might be expected of the reader subjected to different approaches to reading, we must now evaluate the ways in which such theories might be said to have affected the child as reader. The greatest concern must be, not with the 75% of children who are perceived as average or above, but those who have been labelled as failures. In evaluating current practice, we must remember that there is always a possibility of policies being based upon research of doubtful value. Vygotsky (13) points out that in the past 'concrete research studies have embodied critically unevaluated, contradictory solutions which result in a variety of errors'. Such 'errors' must make a crucial difference to those who are damaged by them. It is my hypothesis that many of those errors are based upon the 'concrete' nature of the evidence with which we, as teachers, are continually being challenged as well as being required to produce. If the text has no afterlife apart

from the changing values and interpretations of the reader, can testing ever give answers other than those which appear to be contradictory?

The subtlety and complexity of the process of reading is underlined by the statistic that there are approximately two million illiterates in Britain. (14) These people have undergone the process of schooling, and *within the terms of schooling* have been labelled as failures. Teaching processes have left them, not feeling that the text is theirs to work on, but feeling in awe of something that remains outside their experience. It is inaccessible to them. Do we assume that this is due solely to other sociological factors or that for each of them, the reading experience has been a negative one because of procedures insisted upon in school?

One example of such a history is supplied by Dr.J.Bayer in Appendix 2, whose son, Edward, experienced such severe problems in learning to read that the only solution was removal from the school where he had experienced so much failure. In his first school, the teacher would not allow Edward to progress beyond 'A Picnic for Tortoise' in the Ginn scheme of reading until he had read every word correctly, despite his anxiety to read another book in the series - 'Horses' - because of a personal interest. (It would appear that the teacher would regard the act of reading as strictly defined by the lexical and structural organization of the text.) However, instead of consenting to learn each word, Edward developed an antipathy for the book, became difficult, and would not allow mediation by his parents. The situation was further aggravated when he went into the next class at the beginning of a new academic year, and was put on to a different scheme, so that the 'Horses' book became totally inaccessible to him. Edward's apparent

inability to learn to read was finally resolved by removal from that school since he and the teachers had reached an impasse. A conclusion must be that both teachers involved, supported by school policy, felt it of great importance that Edward should progress chronologically through the structurally graded reading schemes. This evidence would seem to support the notion that if *any* particular reading procedure is insisted upon in school, the child who cannot progress through that procedure will not remain neutral, but may become alienated by it. We see here how the acquisition of reading skills, though important, can be given such primacy that the means by which the child must acquire them begins to defeat the end to which they are shaped.

Margaret Meek's findings confirm this, and go on to suggest that alienation is not easily resolved but, on the contrary, may accumulatively increase. (15) The Achieving Literacy team, working with adolescents who needed remedial help in reading discovered that:

"We were too late. For all our concern to choose pupils whom we might successfully help, we found those whom school had disappointed... As we tried to make them more responsible for the reading task, so we seemed to be throwing them back on resources within themselves that school, for six years, had told them that they lacked."

What this reveals is that, despite great concern on the part of the teachers, these children's experiences of school have taught them that they are failures. Six years of reinforcement have convinced them that they do not have identities as readers and, since most of the educational system is text based, illiteracy must necessarily have been fundamental to their failure in many areas. Given the high motivation of those involved in educating them, how can they have arrived at this conclusion? Could this be a direct result of their perceptions of themselves as readers of texts which contain undisputable information

rather than as something to be worked upon? Does schooled literacy encourage the child to perceive his or her role as constructive in making sense of text, or does it concentrate upon setting targets along a linear progression of decoding which unavoidably suggests to the child that he or she is repeatedly failing to meet required standards?

If we examine the perceptions of a group of girls, (Year Seven 1990-1991, aged 11-12 years) we see that it is *possible* to read evidence of these different approaches into their definitions of what is a reader. The way in which each perceives the task implies the method by which each has been taught, e.g. how much focus has been given to spelling, grammar, prior knowledge brought to the text, response etc. While acknowledging that the first three girls profess to dislike reading whereas the latter three do not, without a longitudinal study which must have begun long before school age on the ways in which these children were taught, we cannot draw any definite conclusions from these comments. However, in examining their perceptions, we may become more aware of those teaching methods which have had most influence in their production as readers.

Lynsey; "A reader is somebody who can see what is on the book. And see what it says."

Holly; "A reader is someone who can look at a word or a book and read it very easy Books are a collection of words. and she should enjoy it."

Sarah; "A book is when you have figures on paper which are in a order. We learn the letters well. A reader is when he reads lots and lots of books as can read it easily."

There is a preoccupation with words and structures. Lynsey, who finds reading 'hard', implies that reading in some way is synonymous with being able to see, then qualifies this to acknowledge that the text is saying something if only the reader can see and interpret what is

said. Holly also has a preoccupation with the word, and sees books in these terms. 'A collection of words' seems an arid definition, with no implication of the richness of what a book might contain, though she does go on to acknowledge some pleasure in the text. Sarah breaks the book down into the even smaller units of 'letters' or 'figures', implying almost a mathematical type of decoding. It appears that these girls perceive themselves as being in awe of the text.

A different perspective is given by three other girls, who attach more importance to the reader than the text.

Kirsty; "A reader is someone who reads books, magazines or newspapers A reader read because he or she enjoys it. A fluent reader reads without starting and stopping."

Amanda;"A fluent reader is a person who reads clearly, confidently and all together well. Reader being a person who reads writing and speaks out what the writing says and understands what they are reading."

Laura; "A reader is someone who reads books either for fun or research."

These answers show that a reader is more than just someone who is interested in, and capable of decoding texts. Laura has extended her idea of reading to include research, presumably as a result of working as part of a research project. Amanda's authoritative statement implies that as a reader, her identity is assured. She knows what is required of her, and knows that she is capable of responding in a positive and constructive manner. Kirsty's first reaction is a factual description, followed up by a reflective statement emphasising the role of the reader, followed by qualification. Her definition of reading is not seen in terms of analysis of surface structure, but of engaging fully with the text in a responsive manner. Reading is seen as a continual process, it does not have a definite beginning or an end.

Within the terms of schooled literacy these girls are regarded as

being at substantially different standards. The first three seem to concentrate on a functional literacy which will help them operate within society, but undervalue the notion of response. The latter three seem to feel that the text is theirs to work on. We see that it is possible that the way in which the child perceives the text and her position in relation to it, does seem to affect her view of the reading process, and of the end which she hopes to achieve. One might suppose, therefore, that the teaching influence is discernible in these perceptions, though, if we do so, we are faced with a further complication.

If we assume that the teaching style has had a substantial effect on the way each child perceives the text and herself as a reader, we are presented with the problem that all six of these children are in the same school, in the same class, and that three of them (Lynsey, Sarah, and Kirsty) have been in a class together since they started school, which means that they have received instruction from the same teachers. Even if we allow for other sociological factors, does this weaken the argument that teaching methods greatly affect perceptions? Margaret Meek supplies a possible answer (16):

."There are two models of literacy on offer in our schools; a utilitarian one aimed at giving people the ability to write more than their name and address and to fill in forms, and a supercharged model which allows its possessors to choose and control all that they read and write. This powerful literacy includes the ability, the habit even, of being critical, that is, of making judgements, especially about the writing of others."

It may be that both models which give primacy to reader and primacy to text may be on offer simultaneously in any classroom, but that those pupils who have already experienced failure in some degree are *increasingly likely* to be taught a decoding method of reaching meaning, while those who are successful are increasingly expected to respond in a

way that gives primacy to the reader. As the teacher tries to analyse and separate out those elements which contribute to the child's failure as a reader, the approach must become more of an exercise in decoding, with an increasing emphasis on getting each word right.

If we return to the six girls within the research group, an examination of their notions of the rationale behind English teaching shows a pre-occupation with 'getting it right'.

Lynsey: "I hope that I will read more and to have learnt more words. And to understand more on what I have to do. Learn more about where to put my punctuation etc. And to learn more of them because at the moment I get mixed up on all my punctuation and my verbs and adverbs."

Holly; "I hope to be able to write neater and to be able to read easily because at the moment I am not very good at writing neatly and I have problems reading."

Sarah; "I hope I can get good results in my GCSEs with my English. It will probably help me with my reading and writing. Reading and writing is important if you want to get a good job."

This pre-occupation seemed to be more prevalent with the girls who gave most significance to decoding the structures of language. Their remarks suggest a helplessness which denies primacy as a reader. Lynsey obviously experiences some confusion, both at the level of interpreting instructions, and in analysing the structures of language. The way in which these girls perceive the task would seem to suggest that they have been taught in a way which has not put them in control. The authority is within the text.

The other girls, while still giving some weight to structural analysis and the text as an authority, wanted something more from language teaching.

Kirsty: "I hope to be able to read fluently and write well by the end of my education. I want to be able to spell and use punctuation well. I want to be able to understand English and therefore enjoy it. I hope that I will be able to catch people and hold them in my speaking and writing. I want to be relax when I work. I hope to be able to use proper English in my speaking and writing all the time."

Amanda: " By the end of my schooling years I hope to have gained a wide vocabulary, a high ability to spell words. I also hope to gain good understanding in all aspects of English learning. I also hope to be a good speaker and listener, and to be able to work well with others".

Laura:" I want to be able to use a good vocabulary of words, I want to not just be able to spell but to write interesting essays and sentences that make sense. I also not only want to be able to write but to read books to help my vocabulary. I would also want a good English teacher (which I have always had). I have always liked English and have always got a good teacher and my reading is really improving the words I use."

While it would be unproductive to base anything other than surmise about the primacy of text or the primacy of reader on such evidence without much deeper research into how the girls were actually taught, what is suggested by this data is that there are two models of literacy on offer within schools, and that these models have affected the perceptions of the pupils. Lynsey, Holly and Sarah have a very utilitarian view of language learning, while Laura's, Amanda's and Kirsty's views are nearer to the supercharged model in which the aim is to control all they read and write. What each of them sees as their aim in English implies a sense of their own identity, and a tacit acceptance of the right to control and manipulate reading and writing rather than being controlled and manipulated by them.

While there is no doubt that functional literacy is important in that it empowers the child to operate in a world that regards literacy skills as a basic right and responsibility, all that has gone before in this study seems to suggest that functional literacy can only be achieved if the reader has a perception of him or herself as having some constructive role in relation to the text. As was demonstrated with Tracy in the last chapter, functional literacy was not within her grasp *because she could not respond to the text*. If we teach the child that

what is of primary importance is the text itself then, surely, we are in danger of disempowering further those readers who cannot find access to it. If the child passes through school in awe of the text, surely this must increase his or her perception of him or herself as a failure.

In examining how the tension between the primacy of text and the primacy of reader affects the child within the classroom, we must remember that the teacher is also subject to tensions. The way in which the teacher makes sense of the child making sense of text must be affected by the differing rationales which have contributed to the policies and practices of reading tuition. In exploring just a few of these, we begin to see how the teacher, and indeed the child as he or she passes from teacher to teacher, may be heavily influenced by the contradictory perceptions of what is required.

Giving primacy to text must be the basis upon which functional literacy rests. If the teacher views primacy as being with the text, then this must mean teaching a method of decoding surface structure in order to gather information. However, a close examination of language reveals that there is no one-to-one relationship between the surface structure of language and meaning. As Frank Smith demonstrates (17), words may have the same meaning but different structures e.g. 'The cat chases the bird', 'the bird is chased by the cat', but may also have different meanings rising from the same structure e.g. 'flying planes can be dangerous'. The ability to decode each word does not presuppose the ability to bridge the chasm which lies between the surface structures and the deeper meanings. What Smith underlines is that reading is a 'purposeful, selective, anticipatory activity based on comprehension' (18) and that therefore the child who is taught to read

for meaning has an advantage. Isabel Y. Liberman, however, would disagree strongly, in that she gives primacy to text, and therefore emphasises that the child must be trained to respond accordingly. In her article, 'Phonology and Beginning Reading Revisited' (19), she writes:

"We must surely deplore a currently popular instructional procedure, dubbed by its creators, 'the psycholinguistic guessing game'...The whole language approach proponents seem not to have considered that before one can get to the true meaning of a sentence, one must first get to its constituent words...And to get to those words properly, one must apply the alphabetic principle..."

Liberman implies in this article that teachers have had very little responsibility in teaching fluent readers to read:

"Fortunately, many children - the lucky 75% or so - do discover the alphabetic principle on their own and begin to apply it".

(If Liberman's model is followed, then this statement must increase the teacher's sense of failure, which must, in turn, disempower his or her ability to make decisions which must affect the child.) Liberman advocates that those children who do not learn to read on their own would benefit from *first* getting to a text's constituent words. However, findings by Adams (20) show that:

"Skillful word reading depends not on just appearance or orthography, but also semantics and phonological clues and is the product of the co-ordinated and highly interactive processing of all three."

If this is so, then any teacher who follows the Liberman model would insist on heavy dependence upon a small proportion of those skills needed to read effectively. The child would be encouraged to look at each letter, and in longer words, to break them into segments. Although the skilled reader may behave in this way in certain reading situations, the argument must be whether the skill of syllabic parsing *grows out of* highly interactive processing or *is a pre-requisite*. Research suggests

that, for the skilled reader, syllabic parsing has become automatic through overlearning:

"Because of their overlearned knowledge of frequent spelling patterns, skilled readers break long words down into syllabic units. They do so automatically in the very course of perceiving them."  
.Mayzner and Tresselt (21)

But can this overlearning occur if the child cannot 'see' the word in terms of syllabic units? Can it really be automatic? Does this lend credence to the necessity of learning syllabic parsing if one were to take the view of its separate importance in learning to read, or does it suggest that it is learned as one small part of a holistic approach?

Liberman goes on to say:

"Unfortunately, for the many children with phonological deficiencies - children who do not understand that the spoken word has segments and who have not discovered on their own that there is a correspondence between those segments and those letters of the printed word, the current vogue for the so-called, 'whole language' and 'language experience' approaches are likely to be disastrous".

While we would agree that certain approaches are likely to be disastrous for some children, it is difficult to agree, in the light of what we have discovered so far, with the statement that the ability to segment is a cause rather than an effect of being able to read.

Since the resulting failure of the reader is attributed wholly to the teaching methods employed and the perceptions of the teacher, we see that the teacher is subject to constant tension between the primacy of reader and primacy of text. In this case, all the failure is focused upon the interaction between teacher and pupil.

Vygotsky, while not suggesting such a narrow focus, places some emphasis upon teaching methods. His view is that the reason why no definitive answer has been found to the problem of the poor reader lies in the way in which written language is taught (22):

" Unlike the teaching of spoken language, into which children grow of their own accord, teaching of written language is based on artificial training....Instead of being founded on the needs of children as they actually develop, and on their own activity, writing is given to them from without, from the teacher's hands."

Thus, again the primacy of text is found to disempower the reader.

Since written language is artificial, Vygotsky perceives the difficulty as lying within its unnatural structures, and shows how, in using spoken language patterns, in other words, structures with which the reader is familiar, he or she is less disempowered.

J. Honey would disagree. Despite acknowledging that the mismatch between spoken language patterns and written might lead to confusion in the young child learning to read, in his essay on Standard English in schools (23), Honey shows how writing in speech patterns would cause worse confusions as the patterns varied from region to region.

A compromise would suggest that the teacher helps the child to produce his or her own personal texts. However, despite the logistical problems of teaching on a class basis in this way (which have now been largely overcome), there would be the further difficulty that the child would only encounter an impoverished language since it could not exceed the bounds of his or her own knowledge of language. There is a further problem in that the writer and reader would be one. In his paper on Knowledge About Language in the Curriculum, (24) Nick Jones defines a text as something that is woven between the writer and the reader. If both are one, surely this denies , or at least narrows, the possibilities of the reader being enriched by his or her interpretation of what the text means. Further to this, if the reader's intertextual memory only consists of those models which he or she has produced, then those models must be limited, and might provide the sort of perfect

match which disempowers the reader, even while acknowledging that one cannot be a reader and writer of text at one and the same time.

Within this debate, there are many such aspects of the teaching of reading which might be discussed. Yet, however we view the task of reading, it seems that what is central and fundamentally important to the argument is the question of whether primacy lies in the text or with the reader. We might focus upon word processing, as do Liberman (op.cit), Smith (op.cit.) and Adams (op. cit.). We might examine classroom practice, as does Meek (op.cit), Protherough, (25) whose work we shall examine presently, or Fry (26). We might focus upon narration as the innate drive for meaning which powers the ability to read, as do Hardy (27) and Rosen (28) whom we shall meet in the next chapter. In the course of this thesis, all of these writers are cited as having something important to say about readers and reading. However we choose to focus upon reading, what seems to emerge as of great importance is *how the child is taught to perceive him or herself in relation to the text*. If the text is given primacy, then the child remains in awe of it. He or she might enjoy learning to decode its meaning, but the text which inspires awe is not the child's own. It denies authority.

In Fry's suggestion of the text resisting the reader (29) we see that by giving primacy to the text, we must disempower the reader. Liberman's argument, as we have seen, takes the opposite view, but the central concern of the importance of primacy of text versus reader nonetheless remains unchanged. In Bettelheim's suggestion that 'factual knowledge profits the total personality only when it is turned into personal knowledge' (30), we see that the primacy of the reader is fundamental to the process. In Smith's work, we see that the basis of

all learning is comprehension, and comprehension depends on what we bring of ourselves to the text. In Adams' work, we see that reading requires critical and inferential activities on the part of the reader. In Protherough's research, we see a similar emphasis upon the primacy of the reader, as he suggests that instead of seeing the reader's false starts and changes of opinion as immature, we should view it as developing response. (31) If we view reading in a holistic sense, it would seem that what we cannot avoid is the *fundamental importance of whether primacy is given to reader or to text*. It would also seem that this may be the basis of why some readers are labelled illiterate. All that has been cited seems to point to this conclusion. The reader who feels that he or she has something already within him or herself which is of importance in relating to texts is already in a position of authority. Such authority must give positive feelings about the text in relation to the reader. Positive feelings must invite the reader to engage with the text, and to feel positive about themselves. Lack of such feelings *always* seems to feature in those people who have reading difficulties.

How, then, does this relate to the reading process as we view it at present? What must be the key is not in the procedures and policies, nor even the practices, but with each interaction between teacher and pupil. In December 1992, NFER's research (32) confirmed that the decline in reading standards was not associated with any particular teaching method. This may be true, but it in no way disproves the hypothesis that those teachers who stress the importance of text over reader may harm the development of that sense of identity which is so crucial to learning.

Any policy or practice is only as good as its interpretation. As we have shown earlier in this chapter, it is possible to 'read' into any policy one's own interpretation, and therefore, any reading 'method' must change with each user. The teacher who uses even such an effective procedure as the Marie Clay Reading Recovery Scheme (33), with all its attendant emphasis upon response, can use it in such a way that sensitive diagnostic work becomes simply a breakdown of skills to be mastered separately. As Clay points out in the introductory passage to this scheme, with relation to other schemes used in the past:

"errors of understanding arise from adults who make superficial or poor observations of their own skills or who disseminate misguided interpretations of new concepts, half understood".

Government backing would suggest that the Clay model is an effective way of dealing with poorer readers, yet the findings of NATE show that, in some ways, it fails as a scheme since progress does not, in many cases, continue when the child is left to mainstream education. (34)

Bruner on Vygotsky (35) says:

" there is a deep parallel in all forms of language acquisition - precisely the existence of a crucial match between a support system in the social environment and an acquisition process in the learner. I think that it is this match that makes possible the transmission of culture, first as a set of connected ways of acting, perceiving and talking, and then finally as a generative system of taking conscious thought....."

It seems to me that the answer must lie not so much in the systems, but in the social support of each reader. The continuing reading debate must imply that it is not, in reality, possible to systemise social contact. Collaboration may be supported by systems of approach, but the actual collaboration must happen with each contact with each teacher and each reading in each interaction. What the child must learn from these is that he or she has a valued identity as a reader. This is not to deny

other influences upon the reader; on the contrary.

Bill Corcoran points to family, class, gender, race, generation and locale as just some of the factors which may have influenced the production of any reader. His research (36) shows that reading is not a specific skill which can be isolated from the total life situation, but, on the contrary, that it is inextricably bound up with it. This is also emphasised by Whitehead (37) in his Schools' Council Research:

"The most striking impression is the extent to which the amount, nature and quality of a child's reading is intimately and inextricably bound up with his attainments, interests, personality and total life situation".

It would seem that these other influences should form the basis of that collaboration that contributes to the child's perception of him or herself as a reader. A phrase frequently used is 'starting where the child is'. Kingman points to the part English teaching must play in the total shaping of personality. (38) If the act of reading takes into account the child as a person, as the primacy of reader notion does, then it builds on an already large store of accumulated knowledge and experience which is the child's own to work with. His or her identity in relation to texts can then be perceived as an enrichment of what he or she already possesses.

What this emphasises in school terms is that the relationship which the child has with the teacher is crucial to his or her learning. This can be illuminated by comments from the class of Year 7 girls cited earlier. Although the rubric given was to say what each hoped to achieve in the course of English lessons, many of the pupils saw what they were able to achieve in terms of the relationship each had with the teacher.

Emma ; "When I go to my English lesons, my English teacher always looks to be in a bad mood and she hardly ever smiles at us, which can be very off-putting and you always feel that you have done

something very wrong."

Emma's perception of herself in this circumstance is a negative one. This reveals one difficulty of systemising collaboration. Whether the teacher gives encouragement or positive responses in learning situations is lost to Emma because her teacher's facial expression is not encouraging.

Joanna, "The teacher has to explain clearly because sometimes I have to ask my friend next door to me what I have to do on some things."

Joanna in seeking collaboration with a more able peer in order to operate effectively, tacitly acknowledges that the instructions will have been clear to her friend next door. As she perceives herself as being unable to interpret instructions, it seems that she may become increasingly disempowered in the position of learner. Frank Smith says (39);

Individuals who do not feel competent to think critically on particular occasions, because of the way they perceive themselves or the way others perceive them...feel that it is inappropriate (and probably impossible) for them to learn to behave in those ways. Lacking the disposition and authority to learn, they will decline opportunities for the necessary engagement."

Jesvinda, in her statement, also shows that because she does not understand what is required of her the opportunity for engagement is declined:

Jesvinda; " I hope to learn everything I should about English. A teacher should be able to have a laugh with the pupils and not be so strict sometimes when the teacher is saying something its gets boring and a english lesson should be fun. A teacher should make the class interesting. But English is not all bad but sometimes it is very boring. All teacher especially English should have a good relationship with the pupils Sometimes you don't understand and you get put off your work."

Jesvinda gives a clear illustration that the relationship with the teacher is more important to her than the relationship between herself

and her work. Without this relationship, there seems to be little possibility of collaborative learning, yet her interesting statement that English should be fun shows that her expectations of both the teacher and the lessons are positive, even while it seems that they are often disappointed. Vygotsky is quoted by Bruner as saying: (40)

"Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.

The specifically social nature of Joanna and Jesvinda's learning reveals the dependence either on the teacher for collaboration, or on more able peers. If primacy is given to the text, then this must mean that the pupil is not expected to hold any opinion which does not conform to the others', since meaning is there to be discovered. If primacy is given to the reader, then one assumes that the classroom atmosphere would encourage each pupil to feel themselves a potential authority on the text, and to feel that his or her contribution might be of potential value. As Protherough said (41),

"Our aim must surely be a classroom in which students are encouraged to look with interest at their own perceptions of the text, and to consider why it is that some of their responses are unique and others are shared with the rest of the group.."

Such a classroom atmosphere could not operate if those responses which were perceived to be unique were also perceived to be different from the author's view and therefore likely to be incorrect.

Bruner makes the comment: (42)

"Once dialogue is made possible by the child.....a powerful discourse device becomes available. It is a device that permits the taking for granted what is known and shared between speaker and listener and going beyond it to what is a comment on what is shared and known."

It seems to me that the primacy of reader method is the embodiment

of what Bruner sees as the powerful discourse device. What Bruner underlines is that *instruction in words comes only after the child knows how to do the problem*. If the problem is one of learning to decode surface structure, the child may only be capable of learning what surface structure is if he or she has first experienced it through dialogue. This link can only be made if he or she is brought to the text. Ensuring that the child receives some form of invitation to engage with the text is part of the tutor's role, after which he or she must allow the child to do as much as he or she can do, before filling in the gaps. In Wells' study cited in the last chapter (43), Rosie's discussion of her chimney, in effect, not only invites her to bring herself to the text, which in turn allows her to encounter the problems of beginning to look at structures, but it also scaffolds her learning in that it focuses her attention on a part of the picture with which she has some personal experience, and therefore some right to make a comment.

This is what Bruner (44) interprets as Vygotsky's notion of the 'proximal zone' of development. In order that the child should develop beyond his or her learning, he or she must collaborate with a more able reader who supports the learner so that he or she does not experience frustration and failure in the learning process. Bruner underlines that

'The child somehow is induced to try. That is surely a crucial part of what the more experienced do for the less experienced...it relates to minimizing the cost, indeed, the possibility of error'

Thus the evidence accumulates. There is little further need to press this point. At this stage what has shown itself to be of crucial importance is the role of the teacher as mediator, and the sheer weight of influence upon the reader of the teacher's views on primacy of text or primacy of reader. The procedural characteristics which grow from



this become part of the child's understanding of the process of reading, and of his or her perception of him or herself as a reader. The crucial nature of these perceptions cannot, I feel, be overstated.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

An analysis of collaboration, and an exploration of the nature of the support system which provides opportunities for that collaboration, with an examination of its implications in terms of response.

In the first three chapters of this study, an examination was made of inter-related writings from various sources on the trinity that is formed between reader, text and teacher. Wherever possible, the elements which make up that relationship were scrutinized in depth, in order to define more carefully what we mean by reader response. What these investigations point to, overwhelmingly, is the importance of the child's concept of him or herself as a reader, and the crucial role of the teacher in the development of this concept. Although it was felt that the notion of the teacher arming the child with those skills which promote decoding primarily at a structural level was too narrow, it was acknowledged that many educational practices still support this method, in spite of what we now know about reading.

These theories, and the conclusions reached, offer a basis on which the deeper investigations of this chapter are grounded. An analysis of what we mean by collaboration within the classroom is made, and from this develops an exploration of how potentially collaborative activities are organised to encourage response most effectively. The teacher as *collaborator* is viewed in terms of the teacher as *assessor*, with an examination of the tensions between these two roles. From this emerges the potentially disempowering effect of assessment, both upon the teacher and the child.

Embedded within the potential acts of collaboration, narrative is shown to be of primary importance, and evidence of this, both

theoretical and empirical is given, concluding that the pressure to produce narratives is part of our response to books, as well as providing the means by which the reader may deepen his or her sense of identity, and his or her understanding of literature as a major aspect of human communication. As part of this, the sense in which the child develops an idea of him or herself as both a reader and a writer, is set against his or her response to the idea of the author as both a writer and a reader and shown eventually to be two aspects of the same kind of activity. The potentially conjugal role of the teacher is emphasised in this activity.

There is a further exploration of the ways in which we might teach, yet allow children freedom to develop their own response, helping them to articulate what is deeply felt but may not be well expressed. Links are made between responsive prose, poetry and artwork, and the conclusion is drawn that the inter-relation of these subjects enables them to be mutually supportive in the development and articulation of a response which is individual but not personal

This chapter concludes with a summing up of the outcome of this study. Areas of further research essential to the development of the best possible classroom practices are suggested.

In the last three chapters, we have seen illustrated the dichotomy between the notion of reading as a lexical and syntactic decoding activity and reading as a responsive, creative activity. We have seen that teaching must involve something of both, yet our findings would imply that the lexical and semantic decoding activity is most effectively learned through the responsive, creative approach. Skills

must be taught *as the child's need for them arises*, and it would seem that the need would be most likely to arise as a result of responsive engagement with the text. If we put undue emphasis on the strictly disciplined view of reading, we lose the notion of the joyously excessive nature of reader response.

When we talk in classroom terms of reader response, we must remember that that term covers a whole spectrum, from the most basic response of the child who stands reluctantly by his or her teacher's side, struggling through a text with which he or she has engaged in no sense other than at frustration level, to that dynamic fusion of text and reader that focuses the one totally and exclusively upon the other. Teaching each child to develop towards this last view of response must mean teaching to the individual, but this does not imply devising personal programmes; the way forward must be through collaboration, and this cannot be programmed, but must happen spontaneously in the contact from moment to moment. What exactly, then, do we mean by collaboration? When and how does the act of collaboration begin?

If we were to view this question longitudinally, we would need to return to the very earliest beginnings of the child's interchanges with others, mapping the development of dialogue, monitoring the beginnings of learning through play, measuring the growth in communication skills, to name but a few aspects of what cannot avoid being a social activity. But can we regard 'interchanges' as necessarily involving 'collaboration'? Collaboration means working together, and this presupposes some shared experience built on common knowledge. If knowledge is to be common to each collaborator, then this must have involved interchanges as a pre-requisite.

Since our concern in this study is with the child in school, we must examine collaboration as it happens in that setting.

When, at the beginning of each academic year the child first meets the teacher, initial interchanges must be at the level of assessment. While the child talks and works, the teacher is continually forming a concept of his or her ability. That this initial concept may be crucial is supported by the knowledge that 'children live up to the expectations of their teachers' (Rosendal and Jacobson) (1). Ideally, having assessed correctly, and having worked out 'where the child is', the teacher can then begin to provide opportunities in which both he or she and the child can collaborate, and the child's learning will, as a result, enable him or her to develop further. However, Gordon Wells (2) shows that innate tendency for children to fulfil the expectations of their teachers is not always productive of development, but may, on the contrary, encourage regression:

".. children produce different performances, which serve to confirm the teacher's initial expectations. To some extent, therefore, without having any intention to do so - indeed, even with clear intentions to foster the child's language development - a teacher can interact with a child in such a way that the child is caused to appear linguistically deficient or disadvantaged."

It would seem, therefore, that if the teacher's initial assessment is incorrect, and particularly if it serves to give low expectations of the child, then the child will fulfil those expectations and his or her performance will deteriorate. Unless the teacher is able to reassess at a higher level, we must suppose that the child will not be able to move forward into further learning. We see that, as a logical conclusion, the child may develop recursively in a *downward* spiral. As poor performances fuel the initial expectations, the teacher may then re-assess the

child's ability as even lower than he or she originally assessed. And so it would go on.

This is illuminated by the attitudes of fellow teachers recorded by the 'Achieving Literacy' team (3) who found that children who were not considered literate were often taught by teachers *whose expectations of them were low*. The teachers who were involved in the Achieving Literacy project, and whose experimental methods in their various schools were often viewed with suspicion, if not hostility, experienced for themselves the frustrations and the generally negative effects of their fellow teachers' low expectations and poor perceptions of what they were trying to achieve. If we remember that within those schools were pupils whom the system had failed for six years, we must take very seriously the implication that negative attitudes on the part of the teacher may result in increasingly negative responses on the part of the pupil.

In the light of these findings, and of what Wells (4) shows, can we assume that reassessment is the answer to poor performance? The Alexander Report(5) would suggest this:

" Assumptions about pupils' abilities should be treated as working hypotheses to be updated in the light of new evidence."

It would seem, in the light of Wells' comment, that the word 'updated' should be taken to mean 'upgraded' if we are to expect the pupil's performance to improve. What must now be obvious is the crucial nature of the initial assessment.

How do we make this initial assessment in such a way that the possibility of error is minimised? In Gordon Wells' (6) perception of good teaching, he says;

"What better way of knowing where they (pupils) are than by listening to what they have to say, by attending to the tasks that they engage in, to the meanings that they make - this is not the end

of effective teaching but the beginning...in each new interaction."

As Wells emphasises, this is just the beginning of good teaching, but it is a beginning which, as we have seen, is of crucial importance.

What this actually means in terms of classroom practice must be examined carefully if this investigation is to have any real value. At the beginning of this research programme, a questionnaire was given to one staff of teachers, the first five of whom teach English at secondary level, and the sixth who is responsible for English teaching at junior level in the same school. The rationale for this questionnaire was to examine how initial assessment of the reader is followed up within the context of English teaching, giving particular emphasis to the different perceptions of roles at junior and secondary level. (The questions were worded in language generally used and accepted within school, thus the term 'reader'.)

To some extent, two of the questions answered illuminate, not how initial assessment is made, but what happens as a result of the initial assessment. The two questions given were:

- A. "Do you assume that each child that comes to you is a reader?"
- B. "If the child reads very badly, how would you cope with this problem?"

The answers were as follow:

- 1st Teacher. A. "No."
- B. "Read every day - even if only the instructions for Maths work increase ability."

Here, we see a clear example of the primacy of text approach. It is not the quality of each reading engagement that is given emphasis but the quantity. The assumption that ability will be improved by reading instructions in a maths text book reduces the process of reading to

information retrieval, though it does have the implication of trying to make reading a meaningful activity in real terms, even if this is suggested as the task of a maths teacher within the context of a maths lesson..

2nd teacher. A. "No - I hate upsetting people.  
B. I always go through vocabulary. Often we read a text together and I choose different girls to read."

There is a tacit acknowledgement of the implications of failure which must come with absolute standards in the first answer which reveals an acknowledgement of the problem of assessment for diagnostic purposes, particularly at secondary level. The teacher implies that this problem of giving the child a poor self-image is partly resolved by her *always* going through vocabulary, so that no particular child is singled out within the class as requiring more help with vocabulary than another. This willingness to present the child with a positive image is reinforced by the implications of 'reading together', though it would seem that this is done as a class activity.

3rd teacher. A. "No."  
B. Send her to Special Needs."

This teacher assumes that the child who has reached secondary level unable to read must be in need of special help and tuition outside that which she will receive in the classroom. From this, we begin to see the diversity of practices and attitudes within one department. It is interesting that this teacher does not view her role as one of teaching the child to read. Could the child see the teacher as a collaborative partner in this situation?

4th teacher. A. "Yes. Able to read.  
B. Halting or weak readers, I'd refer to Special Needs. As we set, if there is one bad reader in the group, there'll probably be several. In that case, I do a lot of reading to them - even at

G.C.S.E. stage."

What is of interest here is that the teacher views reading to the children as being an appropriate way of helping less able readers. This is borne out by other teachers, such as Betty Rosen, whose work in a Tottenham comprehensive school illustrates the power of hearing a story told or read aloud. (7):

"My experience tells me that a told story gives rise to a wider scope of responses than any other language stimuli in the repertoire of an English teacher....

If this is so, then the implications are that hearing a story aloud encourages a response that is personal, while being taught at a class level.

5th teacher.A. "It depends on what you mean by a reader. I've always assumed they can read, unless given specific advice to the contrary, yet I do realize that not every child actively engages with reading material, or even enjoys it.

B. "I have to say that if a child reads badly (do you mean reading aloud?) I very rarely have the time to do very much about it, however, I give suggested reading lists to all of my classes and they keep a record of their reading for me. I also try to get them to think about the practical value of reading, both in terms of exams and more importantly in some cases, the rest of their lives."

This approach is one which effectively illustrates the tension between knowing that the child is in need of one-to-one interactions, and yet being unable to teach by this method, given the constraints within which the teacher works. The message which the child receives must surely be influenced by the low position of reading within the hierarchy of curriculum demands. In giving a reading list however, and following up the record, there is an attempt to maintain personal contact, though on a class basis.

6th teacher.A. "One can never assume. However, at my present school, most children come from good backgrounds and have a reasonable grounding. The reverse is true elsewhere.

B. If a child reads badly, I investigate the obvious possibilities first. e.g. eyesight, deafness, dyslexia and emotional problems. All

these factors can hamper the child's development. After this, I carry out basic work in phonics, word building and look and say methods; liaise with other staff who have dealt with the child, investigate the relevant book schemes in the school and seek the aid of a Special Needs teacher, where appropriate."

The last teacher perceives her role more positively as a teacher of reading. This may be because, in her perception of herself as a primary teacher, she views reading as more nearly her concern than that of the secondary teacher. There is evidence of a willingness to rule out physiological deficiencies and to consider problems which arise from the child's life situation, before embarking on a programme of remedial help which is systematically planned. There is an emphasis on skills, but it is one which approaches the problem interactively. Marrying possible books to pupils and judicious selection of books suggests an emphasis on the uniqueness of the child. Enlisting the help of other teachers suggests a willingness to collaborate with other staff. It must be remembered, however, that in liaising with former teachers of the child, there is the danger that past assessments may colour judgement of the child's ability, as we saw happening in the case of Edward (Appendix 2).

The very important point that arises from this data is the diversity of practices within one department of committed teachers. To what extent might each teacher assessment and consequent action be viewed as potentially collaborative? Is each child treated as an individual? Does the social setting of examined learning encourage the teacher to teach each child as a unique individual? The importance of this concept of the uniqueness of each individual child is emphasised by Whitehead(8).

What, then, are the implications for improving educational practice? Does this mean we should strive for much smaller classes? Should examinations which have a much greater emphasis on individual

response be encouraged? Would this be yet another means of giving 'overload' to the teacher who is already struggling with demands upon his or her time?

So far, we have assumed that collaboration must be between the teacher and pupil. Evidence in the last chapters has certainly pointed to the role of the teacher as being particularly crucial in the learning process, but often, the suggestion of the teacher's failure to communicate effectively was accompanied by the pupil's using a more able peer to fill the gaps in his or her understanding. This brings us back to Vygotsky's notion of proximal development, in which the pupil is able to develop as a result either of collaboration with the teacher or with more able peers. Vygotsky (9) emphasises that

'the actual relations between human individuals underlie all the higher functions'...

This implies that the higher function of reading should therefore be a social activity in which each reader is aware that there are other readers, and discussion of texts allows enrichment of what is written as each gives his or her own contribution to what is perceived.

Does this mean that the teacher must engage in active collaboration with each pupil as a pre-requisite to responsive engagement? This need not, necessarily, be so. In Protherough's 'Developing Response to Fiction' (10), we see through a teacher's self-assessment that, in some situations, the teacher's most valuable contribution may be in fostering active collaboration *between pupils*, given that the activity has been set up carefully on the basis of a knowledge of each of the pupil's needs.

"I expected my occasional participation to provoke and stimulate....my participation was useful when a group was unsure of what was wanted.....on almost every other occasion my interference

was destructive or inhibiting. The style of the discussion changed completely. The previous line of argument ended immediately. If I stood near to them, listening in, they expected me to take over - and I always did." (Self assessment by Mike Town.)

In some situations, therefore, the role of the teacher is not one of active collaboration, but passive, in that, having once set up an activity deemed appropriate, the teacher's responsibility is to encourage collaboration within the group.

In order to test this fully, we must not only examine the issue from the viewpoint of the teacher, but also of the pupils, since any discussion on collaboration must be based upon the needs of both.

Context Chart 2 shows the responses of a group of thirteen Year Seven pupils after working on a text in groups for several lessons. The texts were chosen corporately by each group from a selection of those available in school. As can be seen, six out of thirteen pupils preferred to have a teacher's help in the group for reasons as various as 'to give a few ideas, questions', 'to keep us awake', 'to tell us what to talk about', 'to help us understand the book better', 'to tell us if we aren't making sense' (which gives us a very instructive view of how the teacher's role is perceived). Such answers suggest that for at least some of the pupils in any discussion group, teacher participation is important, though the reasons listed are largely negative.

Town's assessment implies that the teacher's most useful role is in setting up the activity in such a way that the children then know what is expected of them without further help. The *collaboration* was therefore in designing the most appropriate activity for that particular group of learners. If we want to compare Town's assessment of teacher participation in group activities with my girls' assessments, then we

must dig beneath the surface to reveal why such comments may have been made.

This particular activity may not have been set up in a sufficiently controlled way, since my aim was to encourage a response that was as open-ended as possible, in order to allow the children to find their own ways of measuring and relating to the responses of the rest of the group. It may be that, by doing so, the activity lacked direction. My aim was also to increase my perception of what was needed by close observation of group activities. It may be that this had a stultifying effect on the pupils, and it would have been better if I had left the groups to work alone. This is corroborated by the findings of Wells;

"...researchers noted that pupils worked much more effectively when the teacher was not present."(11)

Wells and Protherough's findings suggest that the teacher's role within group discussions is most effective when it is a silent one, or an absent one, assuming that he or she has a classroom in which knowledge of each pupil underpins careful preparation. In working with these Year Seven pupils, I was aware that, in certain cases, I did not have sufficient knowledge of each pupil. One lesson each week was allotted to me in order to continue research which had begun the year before. Because of the class transferring from the junior to the senior school, this meant that the nature of the class had changed, in being regrouped within the new year group. Nine girls out of nineteen had joined at the beginning of the academic year, and therefore were unknown to me. Because of working within the tightly timetabled framework of the senior school, I had been unable to create the opportunity to build up personal knowledge of each new pupil in a forty minute period, once in

each week. This was particularly so since different girls were occasionally withdrawn from the group because of other activities.

It may be then, that this lack of knowledge of each pupil meant that my interactions with each group were not at the level of collaboration, but at the level of my imposing my ideas at each interaction. However, this would be difficult to support from this data, since three of the girls who were not well known to me felt teacher participation desirable, and three did not.

This imposition of ideas must always be a problem which faces teachers. Each lesson must be carefully planned and structured, yet if he or she goes into a lesson with an internally pre-determined agenda and goal, the possibility of responsive teaching must be lessened. Indeed, the lesson may turn into a sort of guessing game in which the children try to supply an answer which is already in the teacher's head, and which he or she is so obviously waiting for. As Context Chart 2 shows, the teacher might 'try to rule the group' or 'ask us questions all the time'. If the teacher is anxious to give prescribed questions, explanations and opinions about any text in the effort to impart knowledge, then, as James Britton says in a most effective metaphor

(12):

"To have children take over from their teachers an analysis of a work of literature which their teachers in turn have taken over from the critics or their English professors - this is not a short cut to literary sophistication, but a short circuit."

If the collaborative search for meaning is seen in terms of personal response to the text, then the teacher who imposes set responses must disempower the child as an individual, and the group as a whole.

This is a serious issue in the light of the recommendations for the

Revised National Curriculum, now to be implemented by March 1996, in which the point is made that children should develop higher listening skills. If mediation is seen in terms of teaching set responses to set books (and the suggested tests for Key Stage 3 seem to imply this) then the resulting increase in didacticism must surely militate against the classroom as an environment in which children make their own discoveries about literature, share opinions, and respond creatively.

In discussing group collaboration, we must remember a further complication. Nash's researches in classroom practice (13) show that part of the teacher's role must be in fostering the sort of classroom atmosphere of mutual trust, because:

"children are continually engaged in forming a self-concept and in developing consistent patterns of behaviour appropriate to this self-concept. The firmer these patterns of behaviour become, the more unshakeable the perceptual models of them held by others will be, and the more power their expectations will have in confirming the actors' behaviour".

Unless the teacher is able to arrange group activities in such a way that each child will feel that his or her opinion is of value, then there is a danger that the child might be given a poor self-concept by more able but less sensitive peers. Although not of central concern to this study, this is an area in which further research is needed.

So far, we have examined collaboration in terms of assessment, and the effect this may have upon subsequent collaborative activities, as well as on the views of the child. We have discovered that the role of the teacher may be silent or even absent, if collaboration is to be most effective. What this implies is that the teacher must be *sensitive* in every collaboration. It is this sensitivity which points the teacher towards those actual relations which help the child to achieve high

levels of competence.

It is lack of this sensitivity which would seem to cause the situation which Wells (14) suggested, of the child being made to appear as linguistically deficient or disadvantaged. In his example, the child was asked to talk about a picture of a skier, and could not. The point was made that the teacher unrealistically expected Rosie to be able to talk about something totally outside her experience. Edward(15) could not read, possibly because the teacher had insufficient knowledge of his needs, and did not give him an identity as a reader. Joanna (16) could not understand the teacher's instructions and had to resort to more able peers to tell her how to operate. Emma (17) was disempowered because her teacher did not smile. Some of the Year 7 girls in my research group (18) could not respond to their texts as a group, possibly because of areas of insensitivity in my setting up the activity. These examples demonstrate the uniqueness of each collaborative opportunity, and the sensitivity needed to deal with each as it happens.

In many ways, what this suggests is the teacher in the role of catalyst since he or she ideally has an intimate knowledge of both the child and the task. However, this definition is too restrictive since a catalyst is not, itself, open to change and the teacher must be so if collaborative learning can truly be said to have taken place. Particularly in reading, the position of tutor and tutee must be fluid and always interchangeable if the child is to approach the text with a sense of his or her own identity. If the teacher has too fixed an agenda, then, as we have seen, interactions are confined within the strictly defined limits of what is required. If the teacher leaves the task too open-ended, although there is a danger, as we have seen above,

that the pupil may be left insecure and unsure of what is required, there is also the possibility that the open-endedness will provide the necessary space for the pupil to respond in a way that is highly individual, yet not simply personal.

To take this further, we can look at two examples of a child's work (Victoria, now aged 13, member of the Literature Group and of the Year6-7 research group) done within two terms. In some senses we must be aware that we are not comparing like with like, in that the first was produced as a classroom activity based upon a nonsense poem. The rubric was to use the same syllabic patterns to produce a poem which fitted the given title, and the second was produced in response to the three girls in the Literature Group being asked to write a poem, in their spare time, about feelings . What I should like to illustrate by examining these two poems is this. Bruner's interpretation of Vygotsky's notion of proximal development (19) is that if the child is to be helped to cover the distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, then his or her learning must be 'scaffolded' by the teacher. The purpose of this scaffolding is to allow the child to do as much as he or she can do alone, and then to support him or her in the learning task through collaboration, so that he or she does not experience frustration or failure. When we view Victoria's two pieces of work we must admit the possibility that if the child is scaffolded insensitively in an activity, or if the task is too strictly defined, it is possible that the scaffolding or rubric may prove more of a constriction than a support, and the child may be disadvantaged as a result.

The poems are as follows:

The Loch Ness Monster's Song.

Hello?  
Is anybody there?  
Good, good, good.  
I'm alone! I don't want people to discover me-  
That's why I hide from those horrible boats - grawww!  
They think that I'm a diplodocus - don't they know I'm not?  
I'm really a super-duper amazing Nessie!  
I'm safe in good old Loch Ness!  
But am I lonely?  
I think I am -  
I am.

Growing Up.

The small dark-haired child on the photograph  
Waves a silent goodbye.  
The frozen face of a lively five year old  
A memory locked in a plastic prison.  
The child is a stranger now  
To the tall, lonely girl that takes its place.  
Now she has lost the innocence  
of childhood.  
It drifted away in less than a year.  
Now she is on her own.  
For a bewildered moment,  
Lost in the torrent of emotions,  
She takes refuge in her childhood.  
In the end she surrenders to growing up.  
Letting her teens sweep her away.. .

The first poem lacks depth, the use of the language, while it fits the syllabic pattern, lacks meaning, the surfeit of punctuation presumably has been added to suggest something more dramatic than the rather prosaic words. While the title suggests a rhythmic poem, the syllabic structure does not.

The second poem has much more depth. The use of language is carefully worked in terms of meaning, as can be seen from the changes in the rough copies. The subject has been used to express a deeply felt existential problem - that of growing up, coupled with the separation

anxiety. The essential loneliness of the human condition is underlined by the repeated images of helplessness and of being trapped within a body that forces change.

The nostalgia of the photograph metaphor is quite carefully handled, and shows promise of a developing awareness of the way in which language can be tightly wrought, yet leave the reader gaps to fill in his or her own experience of the same predicament. In the second poem, Victoria has begun to develop an idea of her own identity as a writer and a communicator of ideas yet at the same time has written with such clarity that the reader can empathize with the feelings contained within the writing. Her second poem invites response in a way that the first does not.

What is suggested from Victoria's poems is that, if creative work is structured to the extent that meaning is of little account, then in emphasising the lexical and syllabic patterns, we are in danger of losing self-expression almost totally. Language activity becomes a decoding exercise or a playing with words, a shapes and sounds activity.

If we look at the three different concepts of learning posited by Vygotsky and delineated by Bruner, (20) we see that what is involved are *props*, *processes*, and *procedures*. The props are the instruments that make it possible for the child to go beyond his or her present level of development, the processes are those mental activities that make the child sensitive or receptive to vicarious or transactional learning, and the procedures are those used by the tutor to ease the way. How we, as teachers, arrange the props and procedures, and view the processes must affect the notion that we have of collaboration. If we do not ensure that collaborations take the child forward through procedures that are

important to his or her development then, to quote Edward Sapir's views of the schooling systems, we do not fully utilize the learning possibilities(21):

"It is somewhat as though a dynamo capable of generating enough power to run an elevator were operated almost exclusively to operate an electric doorbell."

When we look at Victoria's two poems, we see the difference in the power being generated into her language. 'Growing Up' explores a universal truth in language which encourages the reader to respond to the narrative in a way that is not only universal, but also personal, using language in a way that Hayden White (22) describes as 'a metacode, a human universal.'

Victoria has utilized narrative as her metacode for endowing human experience with meaning in such a way that her second poem could support discussion at some length. What we must now consider is whether such exercises as the syllabic parsing have been the means by which Victoria has been armed with narrative as a tool in school, or whether they have been productive, as Victoria suggested in a subsequent conversation, of nothing more than boredom. Could she have been *taught* to use narrative in a way that suggests the transience of happiness and youth, as the 'frozen' face of the five year old caught in a plastic prison suggests, without actually spelling it out? Or is Victoria's ability to narratarize her experience learned through responsive reading, and generated by an innate need? Barbara Hardy (23) shows how impossible it would be to operate without narrative:

"... we dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future."

Do we regard Victoria's second poem as a story about herself or a universal truth? Is it helping her to sort out existential problems, as Bettelheim (24) might suggest? Is it telling us about a past that is personal or social? Is Victoria's second poem derivative, in that it has arisen from her intertextual experience of language and its use, or has it been generated by that inner drive for meaning that plays a major role in her waking and sleeping life?

As Bruner (25) says:

"Human mental activity depends for its full expression upon being linked to a cultural tool kit - we should take into account the tools."

It seems to me that we should take narrative fully into account because *it is the medium through which comprehension takes over from confusion* as the child learns about the social world and his or her position in it. It would also seem that all that we do in schooled literacy accepts this as the rationale for teaching language and literature. If we did not believe that human mental activity depends for its full expression upon being linked to a cultural tool kit, then presumably we would not teach literature nor language. However, if we concentrate on the tools and their importance, there is a danger that we forget that the tools are not the end, but only the means to the end of fully expressing human mental activity.

As Betty Rosen says (26):

"...self-expression is often cited as an essential component of children's education, but not a lot of what a child does in the classroom actually demands very much of it..."

In our examination of what children are actually taught about texts and their position in relation to texts in school, we see that self-expression may be confined in such a way that the child is shown to be

linguistically deficient. If the ability to read is seen as an end, rather than as a means to an end, then the child is cheated of the chance to express him or herself. If the human disposition to narratarize experience is confined within activities such as the 'Loch Ness Monster' exercise, then the child may become linguistically deficient. If we give comprehension exercises that concentrate too much upon information retrieval, in concentrating upon the tools, we are, in part, denying the possibility of that self expression which is the essence of what we are trying to teach.

If then, narrative is a primary act of mind, that the drive to narration is the drive for meaning, that it helps the reader towards that identity without which he or she cannot effectively operate as a reader, then we begin to see clearly why the English teacher is inevitably concerned with the intellectual, social, personal and aesthetic growth of the pupil. (27) All of these aspects of growth use narrative as the means by which they are taught and learned. The pupil uses metalinguistic codes without being aware that he or she is doing so. It is the role of the English teacher to make the pupil aware of the possibilities of narrative as a tool in such a way that the child's learning is sensitively scaffolded rather than constricted, that the pupil is treated as an individual whose needs are recognized and whose opinions are valued, and in such a way that the pupil's inner drive towards narratarization is used as productively as possible

Bettelheim (28) shows how large a part narratives play in our organization of ourselves and the world, in that they are continually

"sorting out the complexities of self-knowledge, the relationships between ourselves and the social world and the possibilities and probabilities of life's chances"

Created fiction is the element which must make the study of English more concerned with the whole development of the pupil than other subjects, because it is through created fiction that we learn to know who we are. As Marion Whitehead emphasises (29);

"If we are what we know about ourselves, we are also a created fiction. As we tell a never-ending story about our life we create a fictional self around whom we weave adventures, feelings and expectations, anxious to improve on heat of the moment reactions by a continual editing process....the ability to place ourselves right in the centre of a story is a valuable start to becoming a reader and writer."

The need to narratarize our experience is the *start* of our becoming a reader or a writer. What then needs to be built out of this need is a knowledge of other narratives, in other words a cultural toolkit, to enable the child to learn to manipulate language, rather than be manipulated by it.

If we return to Vygotsky's supposition that 'consciousness and control appear only at a late stage in the development of a function' (30), and we relate this to reading and writing, then we see that it is only when the child has been practising reading and writing for some time that he or she comes to have conscious control over it. As Vygotsky says 'when the child achieves that conscious control over a new function or conceptual system, it is then that he is able to use it as a tool'. When the child is first brought to the book, he or she must be partly motivated by that inner drive to narration, the need to create stories out of what he or she reads or hears, the need to make sense of the world through these stories. *After* he or she has mastered this, and has achieved *conscious* control, *then* he or she is able to use that mastery as a tool.

This would suggest that, within school, the child should be given

opportunities to practise different modes of reading and writing until consciousness and control have developed. Knowledge of the patterns of language which other writers have used must contribute to the pupil's own consciousness and control of his or her own language. Can we therefore assume that *teachers* use this as the rationale for studying different types of writing? In order to explore this, a questionnaire was given to the English teachers already cited which contained the question,

'Do you work from the assumption that the stories you supply enter the child's experience, and therefore have an effect on the texts they produce in creative writing?'

The answers which resulted showed the range of opinion of one staff;

1st teacher: "No."

2nd teacher: "Yes - hopefully"

3rd teacher: "Too often. Sometimes work becomes not so much influenced as derivative."

4th teacher: "Yes."

5th teacher: "In some they do in some they don't. I try not to assume too much, but as I've often seen the evidence to prove that their writing is influenced, I probably do assume it does. (Oh dear)"

6th teacher: "Not always, but often. Obviously work drawn from their everyday experiences is realistic and feasible. Children relate to what they know. However, imaginative and fantasy stories can enrich their thoughts and instil a sense of wonder."

From this set of answers, we see that there is some difference of opinion over how literature and the texts created by the pupil connect. The second teacher implies that a connection is desirable, while the third implies that it is not. In differentiating between work that has been 'influenced' and work that is derivative, we see the debate in classroom terms. We want the child to develop consciousness and control of his or her language, and the language of others, but as part of the process, we do not want the child to become linguistically deficient by becoming dependent on the language patterns of the text which he or she

studies. Is this realistic, however? It may be that the study of literature does not, as the third teacher assumes, disempower the child but that, in practising derivative writing, he or she develops more effective control over his or her own. Kingman suggests this as a model of good practice

"..wide reading and as great an experience as possible of the best imaginative literature, are essential to the full development of an ear for language, and to a full knowledge of the range of possible patterns of thought and feeling made accessible by the power and range of language..' (31)

Does such an experience of literature train the child to write derivatively, with primacy of text given to the original, or generatively, with primacy of text given to the new author, particularly as the tension between derivative and creative writing is at the heart of what it means to be a reader or a writer. It is part of the same problem of the tension about whether a reader has learned to give primacy to text, and to put emphasis on the words and upon the idea of authorship or to reader, and to his or her creativeness in that position. Since texts we have read become part of our own intertext, and therefore deeply woven into our experience as readers, how would it be possible to identify truly the point at which reading or writing stops being derivative and starts being creative? In order to illuminate this, we may examine four pieces of writing done with some Year 6 pupils, 1992-93. In the Autumn term, they had studied Alan Garner's 'Elidor' as a class text and then, in the Spring Term, were asked to respond in the following way.

As a text, 'Elidor' ends at a place where the story has not obviously finished. The four children in the story have left their own home in a state of devastation in their battle against forces from the

world of Elidor. At the end, although, in terms of the Elidor world, it appears that the battle has been won, the children are left to draw this conclusion on their own, as no contact from the Elidor world confirms that they have acted correctly. The reader is therefore left without the writer having brought all the events together in a neat ending.

The rubric given to the pupils involved was to write the next chapter, beginning with the last sentence of the original text. The pieces of writing used may be read in full in Appendix 4. Here, we shall only examine the first sections.

Emma: "The children were alone with the broken windows of a slum. Then the children, David, Nick, Roland and Helen went to the train station to wait for their mother and father to get back then say that nothing ever happened when they got home and went to bed. Next morning the children got a letter from their Aunt that said:

Dear Kids

Would you like to come to my house for the weekend and I will take you out and you will have lots of fun.

from Aunt Lucy.....

So they all packed their bags to go and see their aunt Lucy. It was a long drive for the kids....."

In terms of the Elidor text, this piece of writing is neither derivative nor generative. It draws on Garner's language patterns not at all, and the content is irrelevant to the text it is meant to finish. Although Elidor is mentioned in the latter part of the story, it would appear that qualitatively, Garner's writing has not affected Emma's style in any way. Should the teacher as mediator in this situation encourage derivative writing in order to increase Emma's awareness of stylistic elements in Garner's writing, and to give her a fuller knowledge of the depth and power which it is possible to achieve?

In the next piece, we see what may be the beginnings of derivative writing in that some of the urgency of the situation permeates this text

Suzie: "We were all running to the dance, When we got there, a man took our coats as if we were going to the dance. I saw mum and dad

dancing. We all went and said to Mam,  
"We've been burgled by soldiers because they want the treasures"  
said Helen,  
"why did you say that you dipstick,"  
"Well you had to now sometime, We have some treasures from Elidor  
and the soldiers were coming to steal them,"  
We got home and everything was back to normal...."

Suzie has engaged with both the text and the task more fully than has Emma, but she is still some way from derivative writing. She is aware of the factual content of the passage but, again, stylistic patterns have eluded her.

Rachael: "The children were alone with the broken windows. They were in Thursday Street. The remains of the church lay about them. "What shall we do now?" said Nick. Helen had a bright red face and it was blotched with tears.  
"We must keep moving", said David, "if we don't they will be able to track us down."

Rachael has made much more use of the Garner text. She has drawn on the trauma that Helen had experienced as the unicorn died with its head in her lap, and shows Helen accordingly. As can be seen from this full text, Rachael has supplied a satisfactory ending, in which the children's victory over evil is endorsed, and they move towards enjoying that victory in Elidor. She uses the same image of the tall figure of Malebron appearing within the light that signifies the rebirth of that country, and ends her text with the same sense of expectancy as that created by Garner. Malebron speaks in gentle, yet commanding tones of authority, while the children are uncertain and humble. Garner's writing has generated a response which has allowed Rachael to develop her own story in an attentive, appropriate way.

If we compare this with a piece written by Chloe, we see that both children have retold not in Garner's words, but to some extent within similar sentence structuring. The sentences are short and dramatic, and

the narrative is moved on quickly by missing out extraneous detail. In Chloe's, the confusion contains the same nightmare quality of the children's being at the mercy of those elements which have dogged them throughout the book..

"The children were alone with the broken windows of a slum. They decided that they would tell their parents that some people came into the house and wrecked it. The train journey was a long time but they soon reached the city centre. It seemed a long way to the dance. The children walked there, or at least tried to. Suddenly the ground shook. The houses rattled and the ground cracked. Nicholas said, "Come on you lot. We are going to get out of here to a place which is safe."  
There was no point though. The ground was shaking. Helen was crying. CRASH! The ground was gone. The children fell and fell all the way to a valley of darkness. Roland was separated in the fall. Roland was on the other side of the valley. There was a tunnel which was leading up the valley. Roland decided to walk up the tunnel. The tunnel was pitch dark."...

This writing draws on the text and supports the child as she feels her way towards articulating her own response. Chloe is beginning to write generatively as her own ideas begin to take over the narrative, even while she maintains stylistic similarities of language and genre with the original text.

For some children, derivative writing must be part of the process of learning to write well. The teacher may set him or herself the target of helping the child to write derivatively, so that an increasingly flexible use of language in different situations can be achieved. We must remember, however, that if we view this as the end of the process, that we would 'short circuit' the system. Tasks such as the above are valuable in encouraging derivative writing, but may limit the child who is already able to write generatively. The child as a creator of text should be able to move beyond this, to grow into response scaffolded by those patterns of thought and action suggested by the original writing,

and into an originality of his or her own. We can see this more clearly if we look at a masterly piece of writing by Antonia, whose attitude to books has been heard on Tape 2. At the age of eleven, she wrote a book review of Tom McCaughren's 'Run Swift, Run Free' (32);

"Old Sage Brush teaches the cubs everything he knows. With his help, the cubs rescue an imprisoned dog badger, and doe hare, conquer Scab's madness and escape from hunts. They learn to fish with their tails and how to catch eels, how to clear the fox path of traps and how to get rid of stoats. This book is excellently written. It makes you feel as if you are taking part in the story, as if you were actually in the earth or running from the hunt. Tom McCaughren is one of my favourite authors who really makes the life of the foxes seem true."

Within classroom activities devised on the basis of my views of the learning task necessary for each pupil, Antonia's work did not reveal that she had any sense of her own writing as an important aspect of human communication, although her appreciation of literature suggested to me that she was aware of the value of the authorship of others. However, at the end of term, Antonia was given the freedom to write about anything she wanted. She immediately embarked on the ambitious project of writing her own book. The following extract is a very small part of the result.

"The rabbit struggled in my grasp, I bit it on the neck. Red blood spouted from a ruptured vein, then the rabbit lay still. With the rabbit held tight in my jaws I trotted back to my earth and to the cubs.

Down in the warm silence of the earth, I put the rabbit on the ground and shook them awake. As I watched them eat the rabbit, I was filled with pride. They were my cubs, my babies, and I would do anything to protect them. I washed them and lay down, curling my body around them, the vixen cub, Roan, lay between my paws and the dog, Bold, snuggled up against my flank.

Next night I decided the cubs were old enough to be taught to hunt, after all, they could tear a dead rabbit to pieces. So I stuck my nose out of the earth and carefully smelled in each direction....nothing. Carefully, very carefully I crawled out of the earth, sniffing every few moments. Soon, I was out, and, seeing no danger, called to the cubs. Bold came out first, hesitant step after hesitant step. Then came Roan, her small, wet nose twitching at this strange world.

The way to the pond was through a dark thicket. The cubs didn't like it much, but when we reached the pond...Bold was amazed at the moon's reflection in the soot black waters. He sat on the pond's edge and every now and then tried to pat it but...to his dismay it disappeared, leaving behind it only shimmering light until it re-formed once more in a golden ball of light. Roan, on the other paw, was attempting to swim, but it was more like a game which involved a lot of splashing and also trying to keep one's head above water. I called for the cubs and told them to follow me quietly."

The quality of this piece of work suggests that Antonia is aware of writing and reading literature as two aspects of the same activity. It also suggests that Antonia's former work was much less exciting because of being confined within procedures which I, as teacher, felt appropriate to her learning task. Did those procedures, therefore, disempower rather than develop her learning?

As a producer of text, Antonia shows that she is able to view life through the eyes of a fox, to solve its predicaments, to explore feelings as the fox becomes a hunted creature. The first intimation that she has power over her own narrative comes with the first sentences. The immediacy of the action is achieved by plunging into the narrative without preamble or preparation, and such is Antonia's control, that she is able to leave the reader in no doubt that the subject is a fox. 'I bit it' gives the first clue, followed up by 'earth' and 'cub'. At a structural level, she has been able to create just the right gaps which show her consciousness of the reader and of his or her possible response. She gives information little by little, yet the reader is never left in a state of confusion. To quote Antonia's book review, 'it makes you feel as if you are taking part in the story', 'as if you were actually in the earth', 'it makes the life of the foxes seem true'.

Should this work be considered derivative or generative? To some extent, Antonia's work must be derivative. If, as is suggested by her

writing, McCaughren's work has fully entered into her experience, then his writing has become part of her intertext, and as such, is woven into her knowledge of language, and of the patterns of language. However, her use of language suggests that she is conscious of the most appropriate form of narrative needed to convey her story most effectively, and is in control of the register she has chosen. She has gone beyond derivative work, and developed a voice that is drawn out of McCaughren's text, but is still unique and sets up patterns and expectations of its own. Although she draws upon the subjectivity of McCaughren's text, she is then able to place herself at the heart of her own narrative. Her identification with the fox is emphasised by such phrases as, 'I bit it on the neck' and 'snuggled up against my flank'. That she has moved beyond this is suggested by the reflective nature of her thoughts as a fox, 'Roan, on the other paw,...' The text has become generative of her own feelings, her own manipulation of the reader, and her own thought and language patterns. On the other hand, could such writing have happened without Antonia first making McCaughren's text her own? Is not, therefore, all good writing more or less derivative? This must lead us back to the subject of intertextuality.

It is in the 'more' or 'less' that the answer must lie. If we assume that all writing is derivative, then how would this explain why, when a class of children are given a story to re-tell, the resulting texts are as various as the number of authors? All of the created texts must share certain features, and this is not only true of content, but nonetheless, the texts are essentially different in the way that each presents the writer's view of the world. Bakhtin (33) points out;

..re-telling a text in one's own words is to a certain extent a double voiced narration of another's words, for indeed, 'one's own

words' must not completely dilute the quality that makes another's words unique; a re-telling in one's own words should have a mixed character, able...to reproduce the style and expressions of the transmitted text.

These shared features, then, are not only in what actually happens in the story, but in the structures of language used, and in transmitting the quality. But while such a re-telling is derivative, it should also be generative, in that the reader or writer has viewed it through his or her own experience. As Betty Rosen points out(34):

" Storytelling releases the writer's individuality, often to an extraordinary degree.....story telling and story re-telling allow a child's view of the world to emerge, safely."

How can this be taught.? And what is it that needs to be taught? Can a child's text reproduce the style and expressions of a transmitted text, yet release the writer's individuality to an extraordinary degree? Barthes says that it is not what is written, but what is not written that makes literature an experience of pleasure, and yet it is this aspect over which the author has less control; (35)

"...he cannot choose to write what will not be read.."

As Bruner's comment (36) revealed in the last chapter, the writer may not be able to control what the reader brings to the text, but he can create gaps which leave the reader space for the possibility. It would seem that it is the gaps in the text which allow it to express the writer's individuality while using derivative language. As we have seen in Antonia's text, it is possible that a child should be able to create such a text, given the appropriate task, and the appropriate space.

The collaborative nature of the child's learning in school cannot be overemphasised. As the child reads, we have established that he or she acts as a creator of text in filling in the gaps. As a writer, he or she

must be able to change from the role of writer to reader as he or she evaluates what he or she has written, and tries to assess the ways in which his or her created gaps might be interpreted. The teacher's role must extend to one of being the critical reader, as he or she accepts the responsibility of judging the texts created out of the experience of narrative. This must include the role of elaborator, as the teacher urges the child towards a heightened creativity, and also as a story questioner as he or she suggests, or listens to suggestions of, the merits and demerits of any text. As the child as reader, or listener, becomes the child as writer, he or she must learn to dissociate him or herself from the work in order to put him or herself in the place of the reader, and the teacher's role as reader and collaborative writer must support this. In looking at the text with new eyes, the child may then learn to evaluate critically and redraft.

What if the child does not feel able to do this? In Frank Whitehead's findings, this is all too common (37):

"The younger reader seldom finds it possible to be articulate in any very specific way about what he has liked or valued in his reading. In essence, therefore, we are limited to hypothesising on the basis of our own reactions....."

While many would disagree with such a statement, there is no doubt that, if the child cannot articulate his or her response, then a very significant part of the teacher's role must be to find ways through which the child is able to focus upon the text and consider his or her own reflections, so that, as teachers, we are not limited to hypothesis. If the child lacks the vocabulary to express his or her feelings, then he or she could be given scaffolding activities which do not involve vocabulary in the initial stages. Such a method which might be developed

could be in allowing the child to paint his or her response.

When a group of Year Six children were asked to do this (age 10-11 1992-93), the results seemed to indicate that this is a method by which response can be encouraged. The children were asked to paint, pastel or draw a picture of their favourite scene in a favourite book. All the children except one (Catherine) were enthusiastic about the assignment and, in the course of working, frequently moved about the classroom questioning others about their work. One picture (Appendix 9, picture A) which excited a great deal of interest was Hannah's response to the book, 'Twopence To Cross the Mersey' by Helen Forrester (38). One girl questioned Hannah closely about her picture, particularly commenting on the absence of other people. Hannah replied that she had put in no people because the girl in the story was totally alone with no-one to turn to. Her parents didn't understand her. There was no one who could help her. While Hannah said this, several other children went to examine the picture closely, and to express interest in reading the book. Later, Hannah was able to write about her picture:

"My picture is taken from the scene where Helen has come out of the evening school and found that she has to pay to go, and she has to pay for the books. Helen becomes extremely lonely. She runs round a corner of the wall and cries helplessly and hopelessly until not another tear could be drained out of her."

Through the isolation of the figure in the picture and through her deeply felt and careful response, Hannah demonstrates that she is more than capable of being articulate in a very specific way. A question which must arise is whether she could have articulated her response before she had painted her picture. In order to throw some light upon this question, we might examine another piece of work.

Rachel, a girl in the same class, had written an account of her

favourite book, 'Jane Eyre', by Charlotte Bronte. The account began:

"The story of Jane Eyre is sometimes exciting and at other times sad. It is very interesting and it is a book I enjoy very much. It is about a girl called Jane Eyre. Her mother and father are dead and she lives with her Aunt Reed who has a son and two daughters."

The account continues in the same way, concentrating primarily upon the facts within the text. Rachel's picture however, (Appendix 9 B) painted as a result of the same class activity already mentioned, shows a horrified looking Jane Eyre amidst oppressive surroundings with a lightning-like light reflected on the panelling and drenching her face.

Afterwards, Rachel wrote:

"I have drawn this picture of Jane Eyre sitting in the Red Room. The Red Room is a dark red room. It is where her Uncle died. This makes it extremely frightening. The gardener's light is making the window flash brightly. Jane sits still, not daring to move and ghosts fly through her mind."

From this, we see that the act of painting a response, then writing about what she has painted, has generated language which is much more illuminative of how Rachael regards the text, and of the ways in which she has made it her own. One question here must be, does this activity capture some already present but unarticulated response, or does the act of painting and reflecting upon that painting create the response? In either case, if the child is able, in using paint as a medium, to focus his or her response to the text, and to generate his or her own ideas in a meaningful way which sets up patterns and expectations, then this would seem to be a valuable way of scaffolding his or her learning.

Of course, this approach may not be appropriate for every child. If we look at Catherine's picture ( Appendix 9 C), we see that no such response is articulated, and we are unable to see clearly the form of what has been made as the 'Pippi Longstocking' text by Lindgren (39)

chosen has entered Catherine's understanding. This is similarly true of Sarah's picture(D), which is a depiction of Blyton's Kirrin Cottage (40). Would it be reasonable to say that the almost simplistic style, offering little depth and complexity, links well with Blyton's world? And if so, does it tell us more about the painter and the kind of books she enjoys than about the book itself? Indeed, do not all these paintings tell us more about the painter rather than the book?

This is one area in which further research might help us to focus upon the the child's response, and illuminate those ways in which he or she makes sense of texts. That it is a method which is enjoyable is evident in the children's subsequent comments:

"I like drawing pictures in comprehension because they help me to understand the book and get the picture in my head. When we answer questions, I get bored if I don't like the story but if I draw, it makes it more exciting."

"I like doing pictures for comprehension because I think it helps you understand more about the book or poem you are doing."

"I like picture comprehension, but I loathe normal comprehension. I find the picture comprehension fun but usual comprehension is boring and the stories are boring as well."

"I like doing picture comprehension because you can use your imagination. You can draw whatever you think about the book. I don't really like normal comprehensions. I think they are quite hard."

It would seem that this method is validated by the way it invites response and articulation of response, as well as encouraging open rather than closed responses. When dealing with the text there is always the danger of giving primacy to text. By moving to another medium, there is no longer the sense of a 'correct' response- the child must *interpret*.

This is further borne out by another assignment with the same class. When studying Ted Hughes' poem, 'The Thought Fox', the children were asked as an initial response to draw a picture of what the poem was

about. The pictures themselves (Appendix 9 E-R) are worthy of discussion, but if we listen to Tape 2 Side 2, we become aware of the value of group discussion as we hear learning in action. ( Appendix 6) The class had been asked to comment on the poem itself and its possible meanings, and on the way I had ordered the work on display, as well as the way in which the pictures could have been better placed. As can be heard, a lively discussion followed:

Lauren (about picture E) "I didn't understand how somebody could have a clock in the middle of a picture - it looked silly doing a picture of a wood and trees and then...like..put a clock in the middle of it."

Hannah."They'd kind of all mixed their words in the poem together all in one picture."

Sarah:"The person who has drawn the picture has taken little bits out of each verse and put them altogether in the picture. It goes along with every bit of the poem because there's little bits out of each pattern."

Can we assume, then, that as responses are articulated, they are also developed, in the Vygotskian sense, through collaboration with more articulate peers? If we do so, what are the implications for teaching? Indeed, what are the implications of this whole study of how teachers and children make sense of texts?

Through the work of people such as Vygotsky and Bruner, we have learned to think very differently about collaborative learning within the classroom. The props which are most appropriate to learning, the processes through which the child develops, and the procedures which further that development are, as we have seen in the course of this discussion, far from being fully understood. We have used quantitative data as the foundation for qualitative assessment as being the most productive means by which we might *begin* to understand.

This study has sought, not only to define more carefully what we

mean by texts, readers and reading, but also to suggest ways through which the child may be brought to regard him or herself as an effective learner who has something of importance to contribute to the act of learning. Any process of development and learning must trade on presuppositions, and these have been examined as fully as possible not only separately, but in their interrelatedness in the process of response. The most important of these pre-suppositions is the willingness of the teacher to enter into collaboration with the pupil, and to deal sensitively with the learner's identity. The sensitivity which effectively seeks to 'match' (in as far as that can be possible) the child to the book must also be that quality which fosters collaboration in its truest sense, so that learning is scaffolded in a positive and personal way for the learner.

While policies and systems have been examined for usefulness and validity, the implication which has emerged most strongly is that the way forward must be through each interaction in the classroom. Ways have been suggested through which further research might illuminate the process of making sense of text, but what is most important is that we do not lose sight of the complexity of the task, or of the crucial nature of the involvement of the teacher in the process of development through learning. In the words of Harold Rosen (41):

"A final word. Teaching and learning never change without a special kind of imaginative act which all the curriculum guides in the world cannot render unnecessary."

It is this 'special kind of imaginative act' which reaches beyond the conventional view of the reading task, and strives towards that quality of collaboration that is a dynamic fusion of ideas and responses between two individuals, each sensitive to the needs of the other as

well as to the demands of the text. These collaborative activities must take the pupil into new areas of responsive learning, while helping him or her to develop a sense of his or her own identity as a literate being whose opinions count, and who shares both the right and the responsibility to make sense of texts.

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CONTEXT CHART 1

Favourite Books listed by Year 4 children (aged 8-9 years) July 1991.

Book.	Author, if known.	Number of times mentioned
Sunday's Child.....		1
Bagthorpes Unlimited.....	Helen Cresswell.	1
A Holiday at Dewdrop Inn.....		1
Mr. Majeika.....	Humphrey Carpenter.	2
The Incredible Journey.....	Sheila Burnford.	2
The Tale of Mr. Todd.....	Beatrix Potter.	2
The Borrowers.....	Mary Norton.	5
Rosanna at the Wells.....	Lorna Hill.	1
Gemma .....	Noel Streatfield.	1
Boy.....	Roald Dahl.	1
The B.F.G.....	Roald Dahl.	6
Paddington.....	Michael Bond.	1
Teddy Robinson.....	Joan Robinson.	1
Vera Pratt and the Bald Head.....		1
The Owl Who was Afraid of the Dark.....	Jill Tomlinson.	1
Bedknob and Broomstick.....	Mary Norton.	2
Matilda .....	Roald Dahl.	9
Honey, I Shrunk the Kids.....	E. Fauchner.	3
The Magic Finger.....	Roald Dahl.	3
Jackie and her Pony.....	Judith M. Berrisford.	1
Hello Mr. Twiddle.....	Enid Blyton.	6
Mr. Meddle's Muddles.....	Enid Blyton.	2
Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator....	Roald Dahl.	4
George's Marvellous Medicine.....	Roald Dahl.	10
Heidi Series.....	Charles Tritten.	2
Winnie the Pooh.....	A.A.Milne.	3
Esio Trot.....	Roald Dahl.	2
The Magic Faraway Tree.....	Enid Blyton.	2
Dragonrise.....		1
James and the Giant Peach.....	Roald Dahl .	6
The Secret Seven.....	Enid Blyton.	3
The Famous Five.....	Enid Blyton.	2
Five Children and It.....	E. Nesbit.	1
The Saddle Club.Bk.3.....	Bonny Bryant.	1
Albeson and the Germans.....	Jan Needle.	1
Back to the Blitz.....	Freda Nichols.	1
The Silver Sword.....	Ian Serailler.	2
The Last Battle.....	C.S.Lewis.	1
The Silver Chair.....	C.S.Lewis.	5
The Blue Velvet Dress.....	Catherine Sefton	1
The Children of Green Knowe.....	L.M. Boston.	1
Boris Bolescue and the Black Pudding....		2
Grimm's Fairy Tales.....	Brothers Grimm.	2
101 Dalmations.....	Dodie Smith.	1
The Weirdstone of Brisingamin.....	Alan Garner.	1

Continued.

Finn Family Moomintroll.....	Tove Janssen.	2
Fantastic Mr.Fox.....	Roald Dahl.	4
Prince Caspian.....	C.S.Lewis.	2
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.....	C.S.Lewis.	6
The Voyage of the Dawntrader.....	C.S.Lewis.	1
Book of Fairies.....		1
Saddlebottom.....	Dick King Smith.	2
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.....	Roald Dahl.	3
The Witches.....	Roald Dahl.	7
The Secret Garden .....	F. Hodgson Burnett.	3
The Wind in the Willows.....	Kenneth Graham.	1
The Conker as Hard as a Diamond.....		1
The Land of Oz.....	Frank Baum.	2
Malory Towers.....	Enid Blyton.	2
St.Clare's.....	Enid Blyton.	1
The Sheep-Pig.....	Dick King-Smith.	1
Little Women.....	L.M.Alcott.	3
The Hobbit.....	J.R.R.Tolkien.	1
My Dog Sunday.....	Leila Berg.	1
Rainbow Garden Patricia.....		1
Meet Posy Bates.....		1
Jackie on Pony Island.....	J.M. Berrisford.	1
Dinner Ladies Don't Count.....		2
How to Eat Fried Worms.....		1
Amelia Jane.....	Enid Blyton	1
The Hodgeheg.....	Dick King-Smith.	1
The Elephant and the Bed.....		1
The Three Little Pigs.....		3
Charlotte's Web.....	E.B.White.	2
Bags of Trouble.....	Michael Harrison.	1
Little Red Riding Hood.....		1
The Three Golliwogs.....	Enid Blyton.	2
The Three Billy Goats Gruff.....		1
The Worst Witch.....	Jill Murphy.	2
The Horse and His Boy.....	C.S.Lewis.	1
Martin's Mice.....	Dick King Smith.	1
The Three Bears.....		1
Over Sea Under Stone.....	Susan Cooper.	1
Peter Pan.....	J.M.Barrie.	1
Jackie and the Moonlight Pony.....	J.M.Berrisford.	1
Just William.....	R.Crompton.	1
Dragon Days.....	W.Hill.	1
Lassie in Danger Zone.....	E.Knight.	1
The Twits.....	Roald Dahl.	1
Twenty Mini Mysteries.....		1
In the Dragon's Eye.....		1

## CONTEXT CHART 2

Year 7 pupils (aged 11-12 years). Reading questionnaire given after four weeks of studying a chosen novel as a group.

	Do you find reading very easy, easy, quite difficult, difficult, awful?	Did you choose this book by the synopsis, cover, first page, your friend chose it?	How are your group discussions going? Well, alright, boringly, too slowly/quickly.	Do you feel you have a chance to express your feelings?	Which do you think is the best way to report back? Verbal, written, group, individual.	Which book did you choose to study?	Would you like to have the teacher's help?	Why?
Emma Entered at 6 yrs	Easy	Synopsis	Alright	Yes	Written report/ Individual	The Red Pony (Steinbeck)	Yes	The teacher tells us if we're not making sense
Sarah Entered at 4yrs	Easy	Synopsis	Alright	Yes	Group/ Verbal to class	The Red Pony	Yes	To help us to understand the book better
Caroline. Entered at 10 yrs	Easy	First page	Boringly	Yes	Taped report	The Red Pony	Yes	To tell us what to talk about/discuss
Emma R. Entered at 11 yrs	Very easy	Contents page	Boringly	Yes	Written report /Individual	The Pearl (Steinbeck)	Yes	A few ideas/questions
Jesvinda Entered at 11 yrs	Easy	Cover	Alright	Yes	Taped	Tom's Midnight Garden (Pearce)	Yes	To be there and to ask questions as we go along, and to keep us awake
Laura Entered at 9 yrs	Easy	Synopsis	Alright	Yes	Group/ Verbal	The Red Pony	No	Better if we discuss on our own, because the teacher may just keep asking us questions all the time, but I think we can talk better on our own
Holly Entered at 11 yrs	Quite difficult	Synopsis	Alright	Yes	Taped	Tom's Midnight Garden	No	If you think something, when you tell them, they say, "That is wrong."
Debbie Entered at 11 yrs	Quite difficult	First page	Alright	Yes	Group/ written	The Wierd-stone of Brasinghamen (Garner)	No	They would interrupt what you are saying
Laura S. Entered at 11 yrs	Easy	Synopsis	Alright	Yes	Written	The Wierd-stone of Brasinghamen	No	Stop you from saying things, being watched makes some people nervous
Kisty Entered at 11 yrs	Very easy	First page	Alright	Yes	Taped	The Red Pony	No	I find it harder to describe to them
Parmilla Entered at 9 yrs	Easy	Synopsis	Too slowly	Yes	Written/ Group	The Red Pony	No	By trying to rule the group
Claire Entered at 10 yrs	Easy	Synopsis	Too slowly	Yes	Group/ Verbal	The Red Pony	No	
Joanna Entered at 10 yrs	Quite difficult	Synopsis	Alright	Yes	Group/ Verbal	Tom's Midnight Garden	Yes	Just to help us when we start the discussion

## APPENDIX ONE

Teacher Questionnaire.

The Teacher as Mediator.

Please would you answer the questions on the separate piece of paper provided, remembering to number them.

Could you use a brainstorm technique, as working out a reasoned answer would take too long and, in any case, 'gut reaction' will be more valuable.

Please would you place a piece of paper over this questionnaire, so that you answer each question without having inadvertently seen the next one. (This is to ensure that any subsequent question does not influence your answers.)

1. If you met a student teacher ten minutes before he or she was about to give a lesson on a literary text and he or she asked for advice on how to teach it, what would you say?
2. When you teach a text, do you teach it to a class, to groups, or to individuals? Could you give a reason for your answer?
3. Do you assume that each child who comes to you is already a 'reader'? If a child reads very badly, how would you cope with this problem?
4. If to be fully literate implies being fully alive to the world of ideas and feelings given permanence by the written word, how do you measure a child's literacy?
5. If you have someone in your class who stands out as being far more literate than the average child, how do you cope with this problem?
6. Do you work from the assumption that the stories you supply enter the child's experience, and therefore have an effect on the texts they produce in creative writing?
7. What criteria do you use in choosing which text to present to the child/class?

## APPENDIX TWO

Dr. Bayer's account of her son's reading difficulties.

Edward- date of birth March 1985

Siblings- Emily, August 1983  
Charlotte, June 1986

Edward has been surrounded by a wide range of books since birth, ranging from toddlers' books to children's and adults' books and covering a wide selection of topics. He was read to every day from a very early age. It was noticed at an early age that pictures were important and miniscule detail was picked up easily. He preferred fact books to fiction and from the age of 3-4 years he particularly enjoyed books associated with animals and especially those books which widened his knowledge about horses. He was so attached to these 'horsey' books that since he was 4-5 years of age he has slept with a pile beside his pillow.

Emily had learnt to read very quickly but seemed to naturally look at the shape of words and soon picked up the phonetic associations with little prompting from school, as reading was taught by the 'Look And Say' method and using the GINN scheme only. She was very quickly launched.

However Edward, who knew all the books as he had been a bystander during home reading with Emily, did not progress so rapidly and struggled to recognize words by their shape. However, he remembered the story by the pictures, picking out the tiniest detail and feeling that the associated text seemed an inadequate interpretation of the pictures. He became more and more frustrated by this and reading at home became an unpleasant experience for mother and child. Books were thrown across the

room and he lost all incentive to read and preferred to bury his head in his own books. I abandoned his reading book at home and we continued to read his favourite books. He reached the blue GINN books (a picnic with a tortoise ) and he found it an irritating story but was told that he must finish it before he moved on. I suggested to his teacher that he by-pass this book but this was not possible. At this time his father was ill and he was particularly anxious. I was summoned to his teacher and told that I had a difficult unco-operative child. I tried to explain my son's frustrations and also that by being kept on this book he was being deprived of going on to the next book 'Horses At Work' which he so looked forward to having as his reading book! He never did have that book in this class and finished his reception class with the feeling that he had never finished the 'tortoise' book and knowing that it would be given to him next term. It was about this time that the Mutant Turtles were very popular with boys of this age, but Edward did not want to have any association because of this experience. I did not want to interfere with the teaching methods as this teacher had been quite satisfactory in her method of teaching with Emily who had progressed to a very high standard. I presumed it was my son, who was difficult and tied it up with his anxieties re his father. It was only when Charlotte went through the system and subsequently, did I stop to analyse the problem and realize what had happened.

He started Class 1 hoping to abandon the tortoise book - the young teacher listened to my explanation and agreed that we could. However, other books from the Oxford Reading Tree were introduced, hence he still was not allowed the 'Horse book' which the teacher thought was a 'terrible' book, and had to read several of these books until I

eventually pleaded with her to allow him to read it. During this time, as I felt that the listening to read at home had broken down I had to employ someone to help him at home. She worked with Edward for half an hour every week, (as she put it) giving him ways of helping him to remember words (i.e. she taught him basic phonetics). It was a slow hard job but gradually she built up a relationship with him and his confidence returned. (She used completely different books - Fuzz-Buzz books.)

Fortunately, the teacher allowed me to smuggle books home during the holiday to saturate him with a wide range of books. (The reception teacher was superior to the Class 1 teacher !)

He has now changed schools and has been given a lot of attention and at last he has managed to complete written work, but still prefers fact books on involved topics, and loves being read to at a level beyond his reading ability. He becomes frustrated when he reads books of his reading ability.

(It was of note that when he returned after the Christmas and Easter breaks he had a new teacher and was 'put back' a book, rekindling his frustrations. When he changed schools his biggest fear was that he would be put back again!)

APPENDIX THREE

Transcription of Tape 1, Side 1.

Discussion between Erinn, Victoria and Antonia (members of the 'Literature Group'. Recorded in March '93, when the girls were in Year 8 (aged approximately 13 years).

Victoria: "I don't like books which look like encyclopaedias...you have to be comfortable with it. I don't like them if they're too new, and if they're too old the pages keep falling out so I like the....you know..I like being able to relax with it, and if its too big, you can't read it..you can't be comfortable, and you feel as if you're doing research rather than reading for pleasure...And the size of the writing as well, because if it's very, very, very small, it still reminds me of an encyclopaedia and I can't get into it...a bit like when you're reading graphs in maths, I keep getting confused and going onto the wrong line, so I prefer writing...like medium size."

Erinn: "I wouldn't choose a book really, no matter what it was, if it was really thin, like I've always wanted to read the diary of Anne Frank, and I see you've got the two editions up there and I saw in the library that you've got the yellow edition. I didn't want to read it because I didn't think it looked as good as the white edition because....I don't know why.."

Victoria: "The yellow one looks really boring."

Erinn: "It's too thin, and it's a hardback....probably."

Victoria: "Oh, the drawing...the illustration's all brown and green and it doesn't catch your eye...and the yellow's a disgusting colour as well. I suppose that's just a matter of taste. I looks a bit sort of mmm.."

Erinn: "Washed."

Victoria: "It looks a bit like... not close to you, it looks a bit impersonal.."

Antonia: "You couldn't connect it with the..."

Erinn: "With Anne Frank."

Victoria: "No. It's too computerised sort of writing that says Anne doesn't relate to anything. I mean, it doesn't look friendly or anything.."

Erinn: "I also don't like books that look like encyclopaedias. I've always wanted to read The Hobbit, but I didn't want to read the big hardback version. I know it's the same print, I just didn't want to read it. You've got to sit there like this with a big book, but with a little book, you can just hold it in your hands. Nice, though it's small."

Antonia: "I don't know. If I see a book I just want to go across and see it. I really like reading encyclopaedia types of things- hardbacks with worn covers. It's like going into a different world."

Me: "So you find it quite magical then.."

Erinn: "We're reading 'The Midnight Fox' in class and some people didn't..they had a completely different idea to what it was about than I had and it really annoyed me."

Me: "How do you know?"

Erinn: "Well, it's just the way they read it..they mmm.... they...oh, it's hard to describe... they don't put..they don't seem...they seem to read it as if it's words that are there to be read, whereas when I read it, I read it as a story."

Antonia: "They think too much of what other people think of them. They don't like to put expression into what they say in case they get laughed at."

Me: "Yes, but it sounds as if they're putting the wrong expression in - with Erinn."

Victoria: "Nina has terrible trouble. She's getting worse, I think, with the reading out loud. She just can't ,she can't speak... She can't say anything."

Antonia: "I find it very hard to read aloud."

Me: "Do you?"

Erinn: "I like reading to myself."

Victoria: " I.....'The Redwall Series' first of all. We all got sick of it because the writer had run out of ideas."

Me: "Yes?"

Erinn: "He was using the same plots over and over again. I like books that are about...I like mystery books, and so, whenever I go into a library, I will look first for mystery books."

Me: "Yes. Right. What do you look for, Antonia?"

Antonia: "I just look through the shelves."

Me: "Right. Everything."

Victoria: "I look for everything, really, as well."

Me: "So what makes you finally choose? I mean, you can't take everything out of the library, you know, you've got to have, you've got to narrow your choice down."

Antonia: "I borrow my brother's library tickets so I end up with fourteen books."

Me: "Well, fourteen means you've had to make the choices."

Antonia: "Authors I like.."

Me: "Authors you know, is that?"

Antonia: "Or like."

Me: "Or like the sound of it could be, you see. I've got to get down to really fine detail. "

Erinn: "I like the...I know this sounds really silly but, whenever I choose a book I'm sort of...I'm halfway to choosing it but I don't know whether I should choose between this one and this one. I like...if this book's quite a thick book and it looks quite nice and sort of...homely, and this book's quite a thin book - I always choose the thick one.

I like the writing on books... I like...sometimes the book's like the computerised types...it doesn't really appeal to me but the books like the 'Redwall'...the front cover of 'Redwall' and 'Mossflower'... the writing on that - it's really nice."

Me; "It's embossed, isn't it? It sticks right out."

Erinn: "I like that as well - I like turning it over and looking at the back of it to see the imprints on the back. I like that."

Me: "What about you, Antonia? Does the writing affect you?"

Antonia: "Not really."

Me: "What about the cover then?"

Victoria: "You can tell what the book's going to be like by the illustration."

Erinn: "Oh, I don't think so."

Antonia: " Illustrations usually spoil it for me."

Victoria: "Yes, they do sometimes, but if you have a book like 'Teen' books - like 'Sweet Valley High' or something, if they had a title that sounded interesting - there's this boring picture of a girl and a boy and this little pink heart around them, or something, you'd be put off immediately. I think it's not only the title, but the title is the main thing, but they have to have an illustration to go with it, that fits."

Me: "Yes - because Erinn said she wouldn't go for a plain one - so you are affected by the cover."

Erinn: "I like covers which the colours match. I wouldn't choose the book, well, I don't think I'd choose a book that was dark black and bright orange! Really, but I'd choose one that was sort of contrasted."

Antonia: "You feel drawn towards brightly coloured covers, but also, if you see a plain cover, you can't make out the writing. There's a sense of mystery...it's like unlocking a box when you go to see it and open it and find out what's inside. Covers which give away the object of the story are so.."

Me: "It's not as if you want the entire story on the front cover."

Erinn: "As though...."

Victoria: "Agatha Christie."

Erinn: "Agatha Christie books are good though, because, at the start, you don't know ...like...what's it called Victoria?... 'Three Act Tragedy'. It's about... the murderer's an actor, and on the front cover, it had an actor's mask."

Victoria: "But you didn't know what the tragedy was..."

Erinn: "Yes, and he'd used (what was it?) an extract, a pure extract of roses, that was poison - that was a rose - and then it had a glass of port spilled over, and he'd put it in the port."

Me: "So it gave too much away?"

Victoria: "No, it didn't really, it didn't give you the..."

Erinn: "No, at the start, you looked at it and you didn't get anything from it, and..."

Victoria: "As you go through..."

Erinn: "But it didn't give me any clues whatsoever until I'd got to the very end and found who the murderer was, and once I'd closed the book and looked at the front cover I thought Oh! Just like that... Isn't that clever?"

Victoria: "All the Agatha Christies have put me off by the titles because there's some really stupid titles like "Three Little Pigs" and "Parker Pine Investigates". Can you imagine anything more boring for a detective story?"

Me: "Sounds awful."

Victoria: "And things like "The Hallowe'en Party" - I thought that was a really boring title."

Erinn: "But I like things like..."

Victoria: "Dead Man's Folly" - that was quite interesting."

Erinn: "Yes, "Dead Man's Folly""

Victoria: "Cat Among the Pigeons""

Erinn; "They seem to suggest... I don't know. "Cat among the Pigeons" seems to suggest..."

Victoria: "Well, an evil person amongst mild men."

Erinn: "The good thing about..."

Victoria: "And it fitted in the end, really."

Antonia: "The good thing about Agatha Christie is it's as though someone's talking to you... you find out each bit of information... you find something out right at the end that the little detective knew right at the beginning but didn't say in the book."

Victoria: "When you're reading Agatha Christie you feel that you're meeting loads of people and that's with confusion at the start that you go on...If you were introduced to somebody in a vague sort of way. In "The Cat among the Pigeons" you were first of all in the secretary's office - you knew she was a secretary because of the typewriter but then Ann did this and Ann did that and you didn't know who she was - well she could have married Denis, but she was a bit bored of him - you didn't know who Denis was, so I think it adds to the mystery. It builds up the suspense, so in the end, when you know who these people are - you know when you are introduced to them properly - you feel as if you have known them, so it's not so much... In the first paragraph Ann was the secretary, she would have married Denis, so and so's the games teacher, she's going to murder Denis - well - you don't like - you like to be brought in slowly."

Me: "Do you?"

Victoria: "I do... and once...the thing about Agatha Christie is if there's confusion at the start it gives you a chance to think what you think...and you're not told what to think straight away....and it's more of a challenge. The thing is....I sometimes work out things in Agatha Christie's- I mean, I don't usually work out who the murderer is..but I worked out that the tennis racquet held the stolen jewels, for example \_ and it was giving you the mystery - it didn't tell you straight at the start that the tennis racquet held the stolen jewels, so I was enjoying thinking, Well, I know that that is true, and I was thinking.. that fits in with ... and then when it tells you at the end, you can think, 'Ah!I was right!' The confusion...it's not really confusion...it's more like growing suspense."

Me "But it's comprehension for you, it's confusion for someone else. You see, your experience gives you a positive feeling about yourself...you think, 'I know this, I've known it all the way through' but it gives Nina a negative feeling about herself because she knows that she's confused, and the more confused she gets, the less she wants to open a book. ...

Victoria: "I think you should feel flattered if the author lets you...like in the 'Owl Service', what Alan Garner is doing is..he's letting them think what's happening themselves. He never actually tells you what's happened at the end...he leaves you to make up your own mind...he leaves it not with solid doubt. He doesn't...he doesn't lead you up to a brick wall and then stop dead...he brings you up to a sort of misty brick wall where you can sort of.....you can part the mist and everything. You have to do it yourself."

Me: "Have you all read it?"

Erinn: "Yes."

Antonia: "I've read the beginning."

Me: "What happened?"

Victoria: "Did you stop reading?"

Antonia: "I had to take it back to the library."

Me: "You didn't get it out again?"

Antonia: "No."

Victoria: "Did you not want to?"

Antonia: "I had to pay a three pounds fine on it."

Erinn: "I don't...Alan Garner's 'The Owl Service, it's good, and in the end, you don't really have a plain block story...it's your own interpretation of what has actually happened. I mean...they're Vicky's interpretation of what mmmmm ..I don't know..the actual legend is totally different."

Victoria: "Yes. that's what you said. The text is not static. NOT underlined three times. No, it's definitely not.....with you and Mum reading...what was it?"

Me: "A Time to Dance."

Victoria: "Yes."

Me: " I felt that the high point for me was when he became faithful in his marriage because he got more and more unfaithful and was going out with this young girl and I hated it, so I really disliked him. I had to force myself to read the book....as soon as he started to be faithful...then I got into the book, I liked him, he was wonderful. But that was the point that your mother said "Yeugh!..... But if you could possible write down the story of 'The Owl Service - ..Don't compare notes.."

Erinn: "I'll have to read it again."

Me: "Oh dear...but if you could sometime....No, don't read it again. Just see what you can remember. And Antonia, do you think you could remember why you had it out for three pounds worth of fines and still only got half way in it? Can you search all the corners of your mind? I can't get beyond page 14, I'm so frightened."

Victoria: "Well, that's the thing that makes you keep reading that's the thing that you say 'Does the text lure you on in some way?'"

Me: "I'm too frightened. I kept smoothing my neck because all the hairs on the back of my neck were standing on end."

Victoria: "Oh dear!"

Me: "But..I mean...I caught sight of myself in the mirror, I nearly died of fright - I was almost too frightened to walk out of the room."

Erinn: "I don't like...there's one part in the 'Owl Service' that really scares me. There's a part where they're playing pool, or was it billiards....they're playing pool in the pool room where the pool table is..and around them the walls have been plastered up, obviously because it was brick and they wanted a smooth wall and ..er..they turned around and they heard a plate smash and they turned around and....this is where he leaves you at the end of the chapter...and these two eyes are staring out at them from beneath the plaster bits where it's fallen off the wall and that's the bit that really frightened me. Finally, the next chapter is...they're stood looking at the picture they've uncovered from behind the plaster and that is the only thing that relieved me because I thought it was like a person standing looking at them."

Victoria: "That's what he wanted you to think."

Erinn: "But that's dragged you on to find what it is."

Victoria: "I think that people like frightening themselves, definitely, and I feel..."

Erinn: "In the 'Whitby Witches' I loved it because I was terrified. I don't know why. It just drove me on and on to find out...how it all finished really.. how it all tied up."

Victoria: "Yes. I think that authors have...when they keep writing and writing and writing and going over the same point it gets a bit boring. I think that even he...even Robin Jarvis is now getting...you know...the horror is carrying on and on and you've had one person nearly dying and another person nearly dying and you can feel it starting..."

Erinn: "To waver."

Victoria: "It builds up and then it goes down again, then builds up in the next book, and every time, it builds up a little less because you know what to expect. It's a bit clearly set out. I think I like Alan Garner's style. It's totally different from everyone else's style because you can feel as if you are being flattered that he is choosing

to reveal some things to you that another person might not get revealed to them but they still read it. They might find out something different but even if they didn't find out anything at all, they would think that they had just been thoroughly confused and they might enjoy being confused....I don't know."

Me: "What do you remember of the book, Antonia?"

Antonia: "Not much. I read it ages ago."

Victoria: "I'm really using things like Elidor because I can't remember very much."

Me: "That's terrible. What can you remember?"

Erinn: "I can remember there's Gwen, and Hugh who's the... I always thought he was rather nice."

Me.: "There's Alison, and Gwynn...I think Gwynn's a boy isn't he? Alison..."

Victoria: "Isn't there a black thing? There's the owl. There's definitely loads of things about owls."

Me: "I read as far as... they hear a scratching in the attic and he goes down..."

Victoria. "And he crawls up into the attic."

Me: " Yes. And he finds there's a... there's wings and things and he finds.. and he brings them downstairs, and Alison finds there's a picture of an owl. And she traces the owl, and then the cleaner comes up and says, 'I want that plate', and then she gives it to the cleaner and it's plain white, and the pattern has gone,... and I.."

Erinn: "She makes all the bits of paper she had traced into owls..she folds their wings and everything... and then I think she goes rather mad."

Me: "She goes mad?"

Victoria. "Well not...you can't just say 'Alison goes mad' because she doesn't go mad..she just sort of... I think she's on the brink because she's sort of being dragged in."

Erinn: "She's being dragged by the legend into..."

Victoria: "There's nothing clear about it. I'm not being mean..I don't think you can really say ' Alison goes mad'."

Me: "So what are her symptoms then? "

Victoria: " I don't know... she just gets drawn further away from the real world and into the world of the tea sets...really..and the owls."

Erinn: "And all the owls she made...when she makes them...and the ..sitting round the table..."

Victoria: "They tell her what to do or something... she gets taken over. Something happens."

Me. "They take her mind over? "

Erinn: "She... all the paper owls are there at night and when she wakes up in the morning, they've all gone. And the paper owls are turning into real owls and flying away. Because this lady, who was in Welsh history..there was a wizard who made a beautiful lady out of flowers and posies or something...then she was unfaithful to him and the wizard killed the man..she's been unfaithful with..and he made her into an owl, didn't he?..."

Victoria: "I can't remember really...she comes back.."

Erinn: "And then.."

Me: "She comes back?"

Erinn: Yes, because hers was the spirit that was put onto the plates because the plates are a picture of flowers that can be made into owls."

Victoria: "Doesn't he..Gwynn or someone.. see flowers, and she. Alison say, 'oh, it's an owl.?"

Erinn: "Yes, and the lady who has been made from flowers is taking her revenge on Alison because Alison keeps bringing back the past and turning her from flowers into owls and Alison...I don't know.. almost manipulates her."

Me: "So what happens to Alison?"

Victoria: "I can't remember. "

Erinn: "I can."

Victoria: "I think she comes back. "

Erinn: "There's this really, really complicated bit that I can never understand where Alison's reading a book in the garden and is it Richard, her brother? He comes up behind her and says, 'What are you reading?' and it's Gwynn's book that he's been given to read by his schoolmaster, and she's reading it - it's the legend of the wizard she's reading and Gwynn says, 'Oh that - it's good isn't it?' and Alison says, 'No it's not' and it's almost as if she's possessed. It says something like the book flying or something doesn't it?"

Victoria: "I don't think do.. it's the thing Alan Garner does is that he mixes magic with the real world so you never know where you are quite."

Me: "I found the...I've got a confused impression of books flying...just a confused..of..you know..just everything beating upon you, without really knowing where I've got it from or why."

Victoria: "You can clean it up in the end, if you read on really. I'm not.. He builds up the suspense and then brings it down because its at a sort of wavery level. Yes, it takes the first fourteen pages to get you in the mood of sort of uncertainty and sort of confusion, and..."

Me: "Yes, he deliberately confuses you. The thing that I don't understand...is why I can't read it and you two can...and you're only eleven."

Both girls: "Thirteen!"

Me: "Yes, but you were only eleven when you read it, and you could cope and I can't."

Victoria: "Children don't mind being frightenend as much."

Erinn: "Maybe...maybe it's because we didn't really understand what the fear was...children can..."

Victoria: "I wouldn't stop reading because it was frightening me: I would stop reading if it was boring, or if it was getting me bogged down."

Me: "Antonia, if you are confused when you read a book, what do you do? Do you read on?"

Victoria: "I was confused with 'The Hobbit' - I didn't really know what was going on. I thought it was really boring."

Erinn: "I loved it."

Me: "What I'm getting at there is that.. is the text static?"

Erinn: "No. Definitely not."

Victoria: "No."

Me: "If not, then half the text is there and the other half is your experience that you bring to it."

Erinn: "I don't even think half the text is there."

Antonia: "The text is what you want to make it."

Erinn: "It's like clay that you can mould into any shape, whatever shape you like. Clay is a block. It starts off like a block, just like a book, and then it's however the reader wants to mould it. If people leave it like a block, say Nina, she's leave it like a block but us..I'm sure, we'd definitely mould it into..whatever we want."

Me: "So you think all three of you at the end would have a completely different shape?"

Erinn: Maybe not completely, but definitely different. I doubt any of us would have the same. Would you?"

Me: "Antonia, something you said a while ago.. 'A word makes a difference' when Erinn was talking about lumps of clay."

Antonia: "A word can.... one person could just overlook it... One person could look at it completely in the....another person could see the sentence and see it as a sequence of words and it could mean something....book or it could make them think less of that book or more of that book, whereas, other people....."

APPENDIX FOUR

Transcript of Tape One, Side Two. Antonia talking about text. March 1993.

Taped one week after Tape One, Side One.

Antonia: "If there's any book on the table, I like to go and see what it is...not if it's old or new...but if I..if it's an old book I like it...new books are not as nice because they feel..it's not as if they've come from a different time, it's just they're new, they're shiny. I don't like that very much. They're not worn.

The old one's got a sense of having lived...other people have read it and felt it and smelt it and they see things that you might not see and experience things that you might not experience...and you can look at the book and think, 'someone read this before me and thought this, and read this'...and sometimes if it's really old you can imagine it being printed in that time. Mum's got a book from the sixteenth century, and it's got gorgeous hammered pages....I love looking at it because you can imagine looking at it all that time ago.

I choose different books... I don't know why I choose them but I just...look at them and if I decide that I like them...I don't know why...you just look at... it's hard to describe, really.

Me: "Try, please!"

Antonia: "Each book has a different type of thing. Each writer has their own particular style...It's not just animal books- it's any book...but.."

Me: "You obviously don't go fox hunting...at least, I'd be very surprised if you do.."

Antonia: "I agree with fox hunting."

Me: "You agree with it?"

Antonia: "Mmm, but I like looking at things from a different angle. I choose books that interest me...like...things that are written about different ages, times, animals...Mum talks to you if she finds something that she's reading that she thinks you might like...for... you're reading a book of that time..it's interesting because you can link it into the book..or..when you choose a book, it might not be the same type...because you see something and you think, that's off my track...that's of the track I'm reading...I might like that. It's..you.. it's like investigating something else..it's like opening a box with a key or something...cos it's like opening another world from the world that you've just been reading about. The... I like the library because of that because you've just got rows and rows of books and it's not based on just what's in the book...you can just look through it. The backing and the titles and things.... they're all different and they all sort of draw you into them. The title could be boring but the content could be brilliant."

Me: "Do you think the text changes with every person?"

Antonia: "Definitely. It's never static."

Me: "Why not?"

Antonia: "Each person can read something into a paragraph or a sentence. One sentence could be a key to the text which they see something in it that other people might not. It moves. One thing can mean a certain thing to another person, and something else to another."

Me: "Is it? I'm a little bit worried.. have I influenced you all? Because you all say very strongly that the text is not static. Have I told you that, or have you all decided it?"

Antonia: "I think we've decided it personally. But..it's been shown to us by parents and teachers that it can move. It's not something that stands still. You can see something in it and you can read it again and see something else in it. It's not something that you can be told, you have to experience it yourself because you can hear someone say that and you can think, 'Oh it stays still, it doesn't mean anything to anyone else'. And then you can think that and then you could get someone else and talk about the book to them and they might say, 'ah, I didn't think of that' or they could mention that you didn't think of that and then you suddenly think it means different things to different people. It depends on your upbringing...the life... what you've experienced...all the different things, even whether you've got brothers and sisters...if a brother tells his sister 'don't be stupid' or something, you can think of your brother saying that and you can imagine the expression on the face and the sound of the voice, whereas if you haven't experienced that, you can't really feel it...what the feeling is...what the character said. You have an idea with cousins and parents and stuff, and friends, but it's not the relationship between a sister and a brother...it's weird..it's just.."

Me: "If you were a teacher matching book to pupil, where would you begin?"

Antonia: "It's very hard to do that... you could think that someone's stupid and couldn't understand properly what's in, but they could have some hidden thing that they could... and you could give them a type of book which they couldn't relate to, and they would just drift further away. It..It's hard to do that because you have to know...parents... that's the sort of thing parents should do..'cos they know the child better than the teacher. They've grown up with them, they've seen what they've seen, they've done what they've done. They could show things, they could introduce things, they could...'Oh look, so - and - so in this book did what you did last week'.

Teachers... it's very hard for teachers to do that. They can't ...I mean.. they can relate to pupils, but not in the same way that parents could. That's the type of thing that someone close to them has to be able to do and then they can come to the teacher and say, ' this is a good book', and the teacher can think, 'oh yes...?' and the teacher can say 'well, if you like that, you might like this' or something by a different author that's on the same lines but not quite like that one and they could just extent the field of the pupil. It's... it just starts at home and has to carry on like that, I think.

Me: " You were very lucky because you've had extremely literate parents, but what about the child that arrives at school, and there are an awful lot of them, and parents don't ever read, and don't like books?"

Antonia: "Mum's got children like that at school. She finds it really hard."

Me: " So how would I go about matching ...marrying a pupil and a book.? Do you know what I mean? Thinking what book can I use to make this child...?"

Antonia: " I think it's rather trial and error, if you see what I mean. You might give them one book and you might notice they're not enjoying it. But I think they should finish that book. They might find something in it at the end or in a bit they haven't reached yet that they do like, and you might be able to find a book like that that's got that all the way through. I think maybe you should talk about different books, and talk about what you would like. If there's just class discussions, then there's always people that just sit at the back and forget and go to sleep. You've got to talk about it. It's really hard, because Mum tries to do this and she doesn't have any time whatsoever... She's quite pleased with them because they're reading brilliantly now. I think you've just got to start off with...sort of a control, and work our from the control a set book like one of the classics or something and just see which bit they like, or if they hate it completely...go on to something else. I think everyone varies, so..."

Me: "It's so difficult, and I do try. I mean, there are some girls who've gone through my hands and I never ever managed to give them a book that they liked and I assume it's because I've given them the wrong....choices."

Antonia: "I think if some people decide they don't want to read a certain book, they don't like that type of book, they've got that in mind, they're not willing to read the book, mmm open themselves up and see what's... they think critically, 'I'm not going to like this book. I don't like the title, I don't like the author, I don't like what it's about' and they don't look at it as a thing that can amuse you, they just look at it as something they're not going to like, but they've got to do.....You could....you could, you know in exams, you often have extracts of books and questions underneath? Well, you could have it like that and say ' what do you think of this extract?' 'Would you like to read this book?' 'Do you think it's interesting?'. And some people could say yes, and you could think, yes, that's a brilliant book I can share...and other people might say no, and then you give them another."

Me: "Does the text actually invite you?"

Antonia: "In some cases yes and in others I think they deliberately do it so that it won't, in a way...Mmmm..if you're really determined, you just keep reading on 'til you've discovered something. In most cases, I think it does invite you because I think the author wants you to really like the book and get drawn into it instead of giving long introductions to people about things and houses. They plunge you straight in...It does, yes. Often it starts too quickly and you don't realize what's

going on until you've suddenly reached the end, and you think ' what happened there?'"

Me: "So which books do you think have invited you?"

Antonia: "Any book. Every book. You get into a different world and you just switch off and you're in that book and you keep reading on.

If I don't enjoy the book, I can't get into it and feel that I'm in the book like I do with some books I enjoy. It's very hard to..."

Me: " You feel that you're the book? You feel you're in it?"

Antonia: "No. I feel as if I'm in the book, just a bystander while somebody's talking to you, narrating, and you're watching."

Me: "You're not one of the main characters?"

Antonia: "No."

Me: "But you're actually in it?"

Antonia: "Well....."

Me: "Everyone says 'get into'..."

Antonia: "It's like a play. What's happening is on the stage, and you're in the audience watching, and someone is sitting beside you narrating it, telling you what's happening. And every now and then ..(....?) out to say something...Mmmm...The stage is all lit up sort of er....square stage and everything else around it is black and you're watching it happening."

Me: And you're not on the stage, but you're definitely in the theatre?"

Antonia: "Yes."

Me: "It's fascinating, isn't it. Everyone says 'get into'. If anyone can get into a book, then the reading becomes easier so that words you don't understand, you suddenly do... children who can't read can suddenly read if they can 'get into' the book that you've given them....There's some sort of magic that happens, and I can't put my finger on it... I just seem to be going round and round the edges...But why should some words become easier to read because you've 'got into' the story, and if you're not into it, you can't read them?"

Antonia: "You can almost hear the person saying them, and if it's spoken, the very often you can understand it, like 'naive', it's not spelled the way it sounds, and when it's written down you might think, 'I don't know what that says' but if you're actually reading it, you just read it in a sentence, you can hear it spoken to you."

Me: "Can you?"

Antonia: "Yes, you can."

APPENDIX FIVE

Transcription of Tape 2, Side 1.

Class discussion between Year 6 Pupils (aged approximately 11 years), recorded December '92.

Me: "I want you to tell me any ideas you have about comprehension: about how we could make it less painful."

Jenny: "Well, you could have numbers up the side, like you had on the last questions."

Me: "On the Common Entrance?"

Jenny: "Like you had on 'Boy'."

Me: "Do you find it easier if you can find the lines quickly? What about you, Lauren?"

Lauren: "If you only had one word answers."  
(General assent)

Me: "Yes that's alright for taking off the surface structure like the question 'Where did Dahl hide his treasures' and things like that, but if you're trying to infer something like 'why did you think somebody did that...'"

Lauren: "Yes, you don't mind writing a lot then, but otherwise just to put one word."

Me: "It's only when you've got to write a sentence and you know the answer...."

Lauren: "Yes, and it's just one word."

Shelley: "I would like it if the story wasn't too complicated or it was funny, but..."

Lauren: "Not like about knights in castles."

Me: "But if I make it completely easy then everyone will get top marks."

Lauren: "We don't like reading hard ones like 'Knight's Fee'. We like an exciting story."

Me: "And what's an exciting story?"

Shelley: "Like if you were just going walking and you saw something shiny under a tree and you wondered what it was then you went over and saw some treasure underneath."

Catherine: "It could have been the sort of script where it's in the middle of an adventure... (Unclear)"

Me: "So even if it's work, you like an exciting bit." .....

Shelley: "Yes, you can get into the story."

Me: "Did you enjoy doing the 'Thought Fox'?" (Pastel drawings)

Class: "Yes."

Me: "So that's a good form of comprehension, is it? And did it make you try to understand the poem more because you..."

Lauren: "You could imagine it in your head."

Me: "And do you normally imagine it in your head if I ask you just to answer questions?"

Class: "No."

Me: "And it makes it easier to understand if you picture it in your head, does it?"

Class: "Yes."

Me: "And what about the Elidor...you know, writing the next chapter...? Why all this laughing."

Class: "No, didn't like it.....(Unclear)."

Me: "Did anybody like Elidor? Last year it was a lot of the class's favourite book when they finished, so what's the difference between you?"

Lauren: "Don't like things like that."

Me: "Like what?"

Lauren: "Complicated. We didn't understand it." (Unclear)

Me: "But you didn't seem to find Jane Eyre boring. You enjoyed watching the...."

Lauren: "Yes, but it hasn't any magic in it or anything, 'cause you don't understand whether it was really happening, or it's in your imagination."

Joanne: "You think it's in your head as well."

Sarah: "Because you're not working. We were working, but we weren't writing."

Lauren: "It's easier to watch it on the television than reading."

Shelley: "Jane Eyre's not as complicated as ...(unclear)"

Me: "It's actually far, far more complicated than Elidor I would have thought."

Lauren: "If we'd watched Elidor on television, we might understand it. If we watched something, then you know it, you understand it."

Me: "I find television spoils it for me."

Shelley: "Well you see, we read the Borrowers in 2A, and we've seen the 'Borrowers' on television, we understand it."

Sarah: "You know when we were reading Elidor? Well, you know when they had pictures? They were all black and you couldn't really see anything. Especially the unicorn. I think it was the first picture, you know when he went into Elidor and then they had those rocks and those boulders and things - well, they were just sort of squiggles."

Me: "So the pictures turned you off, did they?"

Joanne: "The writing, when it said Findhorn, and she couldn't understand it...that writing.." (unclear)

Sarah: "You know when we were reading Elidor, well I got the picture in my head and when I saw the picture, it looked totally different, and just sort of a blur, so I went off it then, and I didn't really get into the story...I never really got into it, mind..."

Me: "So it would be better with no pictures at all."

Class: "Yes...."

Sarah: "Yes, 'cause you know the Trebizond stories? You had your own sort of picture then, it didn't really spoil it for you."

Lauren: "When we passed it round the class, and some people were reading from it, you couldn't understand what they were saying because they say it so slowly and you hear ' then.....it.....was.....' and you can't understand it."

Me: "That's true. So if someone reads too fast you can't understand, and if someone reads too slow you can't understand."

Lauren: "I like it when Mrs. Walter reads to us."  
(Unclear)

Me: " But I would have thought you would find it boring being read to."

Class: "No."

Jane: "You don't understand the story because the drawings..."

Me: "So if the drawings are good, it helps you understand the story, and if the drawings are bad or complicated, then it spoils it."

Lauren: "Mrs. Walter, when I read something out in class, all I do is read the words, and I don't think what I'm saying, I just read what's there. You don't know what's coming, you just read what's there."

Me: "Mmm. Then, of course, they don't understand because you don't understand."

Sarah: "You know you were saying about how you could do comprehension? You could sort of split us up into groups like fantasy themes, and do comprehensions on those sorts of things that mix with their texts and things like that..."

Me: "So the real thing is finding a passage that you like."

Shelley: "If it's not a very good passage, then you don't get into the story."

Lauren: "You could say 'who likes adventure stories and funny stories' and put them into groups. Say, like adventure stories, and put everybody on the table that like adventure stories and then do funny ones....."

Sarah: "And then do different comprehensions for each thing, then you can swap.....see how you're doing and compare marks."

Me: "So far, I've thought of drawing comprehension, like the 'Thought Fox', carrying on essays, like Elidor, and then the old....answering questions. Can anyone think of any other way? There must be other ways to find out what you've read from a text. Could you expand on that.....instead of just answering questions, and if.... what sort of questions would you like?"

Lauren: "Mrs. Walter, I would like it if you read us a story, then if we write it down how we would like it to be...like if we have to do the same story line but how we would like to write it."

Sarah: "I would like it if we were to read two chapters and then do a play about it, so it really gets into us and we sort of get into it because we are acting the story out."

Me: "So you'd like to link texts with drama, would you? Say, we acted out parts of 'Carrie's War' or parts of 'Elidor', in drama lessons?"  
(General groan.)

Sarah: "If we did a nice story....(unclear) Jane Eyre."

Me: "Jane Eyre?"

Class: "Yes."

Me: "Why is Jane Eyre a nice story when Carrie's War isn't? "

Shelley: "'Cause it's exciting."

Me: "Yes, a difficulty is, I've only given you a bit of Carrie's War because of the scholarship exam, then we've left it. I'd like to have a blitz effect and read it. I think it's awful when you only get one bit a week."

Lauren: "You can't remember what's happened." -----

Rachel: "I'd like fantasy things like Jane Eyre."

Shelley: "I like the bit in Jane Eyre where that lady is laughing."  
(Unclear)

Catherine: "I think I'd like a bit of horror in."

Me: "So you enjoy being frightened do you?"

Joanne: "I like it when it's got horror bits in."

Sarah: "You know saying about horror? Well, you know 'Point Horror' books? They're not too awful but they're fun."  
(Unclear)

Shelley: "In the Weirdstone of Brisingamen, there were people chasing them, and I could really get in to the people that were chasing them."

Me: "Yet it had a very weak end. Can you remember the end?"

Jenny: "In Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, what made me go on was the sweets."

Me: "What is it about Roald Dahl that makes even people who don't like reading go on reading him? Is it.. can the writer come halfway to meet you, do you think?"

Rachel: "It's funny."

Me: "And do you like funny books?"

Charlotte: "When you're reading it out, you can read funny voices."  
(Unclear)

Me: "Do you feel as if Roald Dahl is using real people?"

Class: "Yes."

Lauren: "He's acting real life. Matilda feels like our house."

Shelley: "In Matilda, you know the superglue in the hat? Well, in normal life, you wouldn't get that."

Sarah: "You know Roald Dahl? You would think he was a little child because that's how we always think, and he puts little bits in his books that older people don't put in their books, and it makes it feel like real life children. "

Catherine: "At the moment I'm reading 'The Hobbit'. Well, I find it very interesting because it's about these tiny little squidgy monsters."

Me: "Yet we started reading 'The Hobbit' last year with the class who loved Elidor, and they just weren't interested. They didn't like it at all. And yet, they adored Elidor. We did a list of Top Ten Favourite books, and Elidor was in an awful lot of those lists."

APPENDIX SIX

Tape Two, Side Two.

Class discussion between girls from Year 6 1992 - 1993. Aged approximately eleven years.

Class: "The Thought Fox, by Ted Hughes.

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:  
Something else is alive  
Beside the clock's loneliness  
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:  
Something more near  
Though deeper within darkness  
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,  
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;  
Two eyes serve a movement, that now  
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow  
Between trees, and warily a lame  
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow  
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,  
A widening deepening greenness,  
Brilliantly, concentratedly,  
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox  
It enters the dark hole of the head.  
The window is starless still: the clock ticks,  
The page is printed.

Me: "Right. First of all, does anyone like that poem and, if so, why? Catherine?"

Catherine: "I like it because it's got some realistic bits in it. You can tell that somebody's thinking of a fox in a window, and then drawing a picture of it or writing about it."

Me: "Good. What do you mean; realistic bits?"

Catherine: "Well, sort of like you could see the fox in your head."

Me: "Good. Right, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth: "I think it's good because really you can think what he's thinking, and it's nice about the fox as well."

Me: "So, it's as if it helps you get inside the poet's head?"

Elizabeth: "Yes."

Hannah: "Well, the first bit's like Elizabeth...because you can actually think what he's thinking when he's writing the poem - it puts pictures in your head."

Me: "Yes. When I said you could draw....when you first saw the poem, did you understand it? Did you, Joanne?"

Joanne: "No."

Me: "Oh, and when I said, 'Draw it', what was your reaction? Can you remember whether you were horrified or pleased, or 'Oh heck, what am I going to do?' Or what?"

Joanne: "Horrified."

Me: "Right. Lauren.?"

Lauren: "Horrified, because I didn't know what to do, and really I just looked around to see what other people were doing. I didn't know what to do...I knew I had to draw a fox, but I didn't know what to do."

Me: "And so when you saw what other people were doing, what effect did that have on you? I mean, did you just copy someone else's picture, or did you take ideas and....."

Lauren: "I took ideas. I didn't understand why some people did the clock in the middle of the picture...it looked silly doing a picture of the wood and trees, and then somebody...like...put a clock in the middle of it. It looked silly." (Picture E)

Me: "Why?"

Lauren: "I don't know."

Me: "Did anyone think that isn't silly? Right Hannah, What do you ....?"

Hannah: "Well, they kind of mixed all the words together in the poem and put them all in one picture."

Me: "Yes. It's like a dream isn't it, in some ways - everything you - you get odd things, all together in a dream. Sarah?"

Sarah: "The person who's drawn the picture has taken little bits out of each verse and put them all together in the picture, which sort of goes along with every bit of the poem because there's little bits out of each passage."

Me: "Shelley"

Shelley: "Well, sometimes I sort of just..read the poem, and sometimes it doesn't go in...the picture doesn't go into my head of what the poem really is, so...when I come to drawing...I sort of like was blank....I didn't know what to draw."

Me: "So, how did you actually get something down?"

Shelley: "I read the poem again and sort of like looked at everybody else to see what they were doing."

Me: "And whose ideas did you think were good? You know...can you remember looking at anyone else's and thinking... 'Oh, I like that'.... 'that's a good idea'....and 'that isn't a good idea'. Or do you not remember?"

Shelley: "I don't remember."

Me: "Right. Catherine."

Catherine: "When you said to try and draw the picture in your head, what you thought about it...well, I thought, 'Well, how am I going to do this?' 'cause at first I didn't know what the heck you meant by it because...mm...just after I'd read it and stuff, it all..like Shelley, it didn't all go into my head, so I thought, 'I'm going to do this'...then I just peeped over somebody's shoulder, just thought about something, and put something different to what they'd put down. Just started...fiddling about really."

Me: "Good. Yes. Joanne?"

Joanne: "I liked...first of all, I didn't really like the poem, and then I thought of something like the fox putting its foot down and going along the path, so I started drawing that, and then I thought of something else, so I drew that."

Me: "Did it?...Yes... do you like the poem now? Yes? Did anyone else find that after they'd done the picture, they liked the poem better than they had in the beginning? How many? One, two three, four five ..and a ditherer...Who didn't have their hand up? Right, Lauren, what effect did it have on you?"

Lauren: "Well....it was...I didn't not like it, but I just really didn't really understand it. That's why I really didn't like it."

Me: "And did you feel you understood it more at the end? I mean, when you're looking at this now, does it help you understand it any more?"

Lauren: "Well, it helps me understand it more, but it doesn't help me like it any more."

Me: "Right. But you do understand it a bit more? You think so? Or am I putting words into your mouth? Sorry. I don't mean to put words into your mouth."

Lauren: "I think so. It's just, when I read it first, I thought it was really boring."

Me: "That tends to be your first reaction to an awful lot of things!"

Lauren: "I didn't think it made sense when I first read it. Now, I can sort of..."

Me: "Sort of...?"

Lauren: "See it."

Me: "When I put these pictures up, I didn't know which bit people had been thinking of (when they were drawing them). Do you think I've put them up in the right way, or does anyone think that one of the pictures - or any of the pictures - is in the wrong place? Would anyone put them up differently?..Because, it was really difficult...Elizabeth."

Elizabeth: "Probably where it says 'Page is printed' (R), may be something more like this one (F) you know."

Me: "Oh, yes."

Elizabeth: "Sort of.. 'the page is printed'"

Me: "Yes. The page is mentioned at the end of the poem of course...the beginning and the end....so.. were there any other pictures of pages?"

Natasha: "Well, there's one with a face." (O)

Me: "Where?"

Natasha: "There's one with a face looking out in shadow...looking out of the window. Just there...an eye...a widening..."

Me: "I still can't see it."

Jenny: "A head shape."

Me: "Oh, this one?"

Jane?: "But it talked about the fox's eye!"

Me: "Oh yes. Above ...'an eye...a widening.."

Jenny: "Yes. I would have thought that (O) would have been first because he's looking out of the window. Yes. He's like, thinking of what to do."

Me: "Yes. Yes I see... at the beginning. There wasn't anything there."

Natasha: "No, and the forest..."

Me: "Through the window I see no star...something more near...? Yes, I see..."

MNatasha: "I mean that one. (J)"

Me: "Which one?"

Natasha: "A fox's nose touches...."

Me: "Twig... so that one... that should have been next to 'the forest'?"

Shelley: "I think that one...when it touches..well I think...yes..that one (P) there should be 'touches twig'"

Me: "Right. The one above deepening greenness."

Shelley: "That should be...about... at 'touches twig, leaf'."

Me: "Yes. I see that.... that's good."

Catherine: "Mrs. Walter, that one (M) should be there (in M's place) because it's going..."

Me: "Which one? The one beneath 'stump and hollow'?"

Catherine: "Yes...that's.."

Me: "That's in the right place, is it?"

Shelley: "Mrs. Walter, I think that the one with the 'widening, deepening greenness' (P)..no...the one above... I think that one should be 'through the window I see no star'. And then that one (N)"

"Yes, but there's.."

Me: "Oh yes, I see. Yes, you're right, Shelley. That one would have been much better. Yes Joanne?"

Joanne: "I think the one above 'the page is printed' (R) should be there."

Me. "Where?"

Joanne: "There." (R to F's place.)

Me: "On this blank page?"

Joanne: "Yes, that one."

Me: "Yes, and that one (F) to there (R's place)."

Joanne: "Yes because when the page is printed, he starts writing."

Shelley: "No it's not."

Natasha: "He's just done it."

Shelley: "I also think that because it's like coming out of his head, he should be thinking about it."

Me: "Oh, I see....So that (R) looks like a thought bubble? I hadn't realized it was a thought bubble! I'll have to get someone else to put my displays up, because you could do it better than I can."

Charlotte: "Yes, because 'I imagine'.....'the window'...and I remember, 'the window is starless still'."

Me: "Yes, yes..I should, shouldn't I?"

Jenny: "That one there (R) should be up to the top (E's place)."

Me: "Which one should be where?"

Elizabeth: "The bubble one." (R)

Me: "The page is printed? (R) The bubble one should be to 'I imagine this midnight moment's forest'?" (E)

Elizabeth: "Yes, because he's imagining the bubble. That's what I thought."

Me: "In that case, where should the clock saying midnight be?"

Charlotte: "At the beginning. Mrs. Walter?"

Me: "At the beginning of the...?"

Charlotte: "Yes. Beside the clock's loneliness...I thought that the bubble would go at the top and mmm 'I imagine this midnight moment's forest' and that, the one underneath, should go down there."

Me: "At the end."

Jenny: "Yes... and the top one should go down...'and this blank page where my fingers move"

Me: "So the clock should be...'and this blank page where my fingers move, right?"

Shelley: "'Through the window I see no star' (G)That one should be there." (?)

Natasha. "I think...it is... an eye... I think that one should go there because he's looking out of the window thinking what to write. It should be 'through the window I see no star'...well, maybe." (Q to G's place.)

Me: "The window is starless still?"

Elizabeth: "Yes, because there isn't many stars. Because there's none of them really with stars."

Natasha: "I think the one with the face on should be 'this blank page where my fingers move' because he's looking through the window thinking what to write."

Class: (Unclear)

Catherine: "I think that one should be...it looks like..."

Me: "Yes?"

Catherine: "This blank page where my fingers move." (F to E's place)

Me: "Across the top?"

Sarah: "The one at the top (E) that should have been to 'and sets neat prints into the snow' because the prints...you can see the prints."

Me: "Where is sets neat prints? What did I put above it? Oh, I see..."

Elizabeth: " 'Two eyes serve a movement' should be there because it's like two eyes."

Me: "Yes, but you just get a deepening....concentratedly you see...where did you say? Do you see that some of the pictures have implied the fox is actually there... like that one (M)...and that one (R) through the bubble, has implied that the fox isn't there. Which do you think? Do you think it was in his head? You've done both."

Class: "Head."

Sarah: "One's got a clock on, one's got a person on, one's got a book on, one's got some trees on...."

Elizabeth: "I haven't a clue."

Me: "Do you think it's a good example of how you write a poem? I mean, if I say to you 'write a poem'.. or if I say 'write a poem for homework' is the process that you go through anything like this...where you look around the room and you think, 'what am I going to write about'?"

Shelley: "Mrs. Walter, I think if you give me this poem for homework I don't think I would have understood it...more..of what we're doing now. And you also helped us by sort of reading through this and sort of talking about it. Like, I understand it more instead of you just giving us it for homework and saying 'learn that poem'."

Natasha: "And it's helping us learn it now."

Me: "You were saying I tell you to understand it. Do I do that?"

Class: "Yes."

Me: "But that means that that's just my interpretation of the poem, and that might be wrong."

Lauren: "If you have a picture to show each line, you can see what the fox is doing, then you can understand each line and you can tell what the line means."

Me: "But I didn't tell you what to do...what to draw, did I?"

Class: "No, but you told us how to understand it by saying lines of the poem. " (Unclear)

## APPENDIX SEVEN

Examples of writing, in response to the last sentence of Alan Garner's 'Elidor', done by Year 6 girls (that is, aged ten to eleven years) in the Spring term of the academic year 1992-1993.

Emma's story:

The children were alone with the broken windows of a slum. When the children David, Nick, Roland and Helen went to the train station to wait for their mother and father to get back then say that nothing ever happened when they got home and went to bed. Next morning, the children got a letter from their Aunt that said:

Dear Kids,  
Would you like to  
come to my house for  
the weekend and I  
will take you out  
and you'll have lots of  
fun.

from Aunt Lucy.

So they all packed their bags to go and see Aunt Lucy. It was a long drive for the kids. When they finally got there, they rang the doorbell and a plump sort of person answered the door. She had dark brown hair, blue eyes and she said, "Come in kids. After that long journey you've had, come in and have something to drink." They went up. It was a long time to get there so they went to bed.

Next morning then in Nick's bag they found one more treasure from Elidor and they went into the nearest church. They went into Elidor and threw the treasure back. They wanted to stay there for a little while but their Aunt would get worried because it was lunch time.

Suzie's story:

We were all running to the dance. When we got there, a man took our coats as if we were going to the dance. I saw Mum and Dad dancing. We all went and said to Mam, "We've been burgled by soldiers because they want the treasures," said Helen.

"Why did you say that, you dipstick?"

"Well you have to know sometime. We have some treasures from Elidor, and the soldiers were coming to steal them."

We got home and everything was back to normal except for a piece of paper. I stuck it all back together and it said,

Dear Watsons,  
I'LL BE BACK!

Mam saw it and dialled 999 and the police came straight away. The police came and took fingerprints and things. We were upstairs and we saw a sparkle. It was the stone. We threw it in the river and it bounced on the river all the way down. We were all at the station when we were all in jail for twenty years for disturbing the police.

Rachael's story:

The End of Elidor.

The children were all alone with the broken windows. They were in Thursday Street. The remains of the church lay about them.

"What shall we do now?" said Nick. Helen had a bright red face and it was blotched with tears.

"We must keep moving," said David, "If we don't, they will be able to track us down."

"We could go to the hotel," said Roland, "Can anybody remember the name of it?"

"I can. It's called the Swallow," said Helen.

"Right," said David. "The station's up there." He pointed up the dark street. Suddenly a bright light shone in front of them. A figure appeared. Helen ran forwards as she realized who it was. Malebron stood with the treasures in his hand. He made a sign with his hand to come.

"Go through that doorway," Malebron said. "I will come to. Don't worry about the house. I have mended it."

"Oh Malebron," said Helen, "Findhorn has died because I broke the pot."

"Findhorn is well, he has gone to Elidor," he replied.

"Can we go to Elidor again?" asked Roland.

"Yes," said Malebron, "and time will stand still for you here."

Chloe's story:

The children were alone with the broken windows of the slum. They decided that they would tell their parents that some people came into the house and wrecked it.

The train journey was a long time but they soon reached the city centre. It seemed a long way to the dance. The children walked there or at least, tried to.

Suddenly the ground shook. The houses rattled and the ground cracked. Nicholas said, "Come on you lot, we're going to get out of here to a place which is safe." There was no point though. The ground was falling. Helen was crying. CRASH! The ground was gone. The children fell and fell all the way to a valley of darkness. Roland was separated in the fall.

Roland was on the other side of the valley. There was a tunnel which was leading up the valley, and Roland decided to walk up it. The tunnel was pitch dark. Roland thought that this tunnel would lead him back to earth.

Helen was so scared in the valley of darkness. There was another bang. Roland appeared from a hole in the valley. He had found the treasures in the tunnel.

The children thought that they were back in Elidor. They were right.

The children ran over all the bumps in the ground, looking for a bit of light. Soon the darkness did turn to lightness. The children were puzzled because they had found a book. The book was a magical book. If you had every treasure, the book would work. There was another crash. The children found themselves back in their house. There was no sign of any broken china. Everything was as right as rain. Nicholas and David were watching the television the minute they got it tuned. Helen and Roland decided to go to bed.

The children never told their parents about their adventures. The treasures were no-where in sight. Neither was the book.



~~The girl~~

The small, dark-haired child on the  
WarA silent ~~photograph~~ ~~is~~ ~~if~~ ~~she~~  
photograph ~~is~~ ~~if~~ ~~she~~

~~A stranger~~ ~~is~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~memory~~ ~~locked~~  
in an artificial scene.

of a frozen face of a five year old.

A stranger now to the tall lonely girl  
that takes its place.

She tries to remember, but no picture

comes. ~~she~~ ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~that~~ ~~she~~ ~~has~~

~~As if~~ ~~she~~ ~~is~~ ~~bound~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~future~~

Yet she longs to be older: the present  
is too great.

She knows that her childhood is  
lost

For the first time  
She realizes that she is alive  
And she has something to work for  
Her independence.

Forgetting childhood obedience <sup>she defies her</sup>  
This time she wants to rebel <sup>parents, and</sup>  
The first to stray from her mothers <sup>enjoys it.</sup>

She feels out on her own <sup>unconscious</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>breaking</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>family</sup>  
With nervous fingers, until she reaches  
something.

Wishing herself sixteen years old,  
She feels helpless.

As if still labelled a child when she  
has things to work for,  
Wants to sort ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> life out NOW.

The frustration,  
That it is only her who will ever know  
when she is ready to be an adult.  
Rachel lies in the dark wishing that she had  
her sister back.

Unconsciously straying from her mother's  
reliable routine.

She turns a friendly chatter with her  
parents into an angry confrontation.

This time she wants to rebel.

Forgetting childhood obedience

As her temper flares at the slightest thing

She forgets her careful upbringing

She forgets her pattern of perfection

That was painstakingly cut out by her parents.

Nobody understands her

But she does not understand them.

It is my life.

In another room

Her sister is crying

Wanting her old sister back.

The

The small dark-haired child on the

photograph

Waves a silent goodbye.

The frozen face of a lively five year old  
locked in a plastic prison forever.

The child is a stranger to the tall, lonely  
girl that takes its place.

Sometimes she longs for the innocence  
of her childhood.

Which she has lost in the space of a year.  
Slowly and surely drifting away.

Now her life is of a clichéd teenager,  
All the feelings which are so new and  
unique to her have been written  
matter of factly.

In some un-sympathetic advice book.

The girl knows she is changing.

Her friends notice that she is not quite  
the same person.

Alone: her own fault, maybe her own wish.

# FINAL DRAFT

Growing up:

The small dark-haired child on the  
photograph

Waves a silent goodbye.

The frozen face of a lively five year old.

A memory: locked in a plastic prison.

The child is a stranger now.

To the tall, lonely girl that takes its  
place.

Now she has lost the innocence ~~of~~  
~~of~~ childhood.

It drifted away in less than a year.

~~She is the same person~~

Now she is on her own.

For a bewildered moment,

Lost in the torment of emotions,

She takes refuge in her childhood.

In the end she surrenders to growing up

Letting her tears sweep her away.

A



B



C

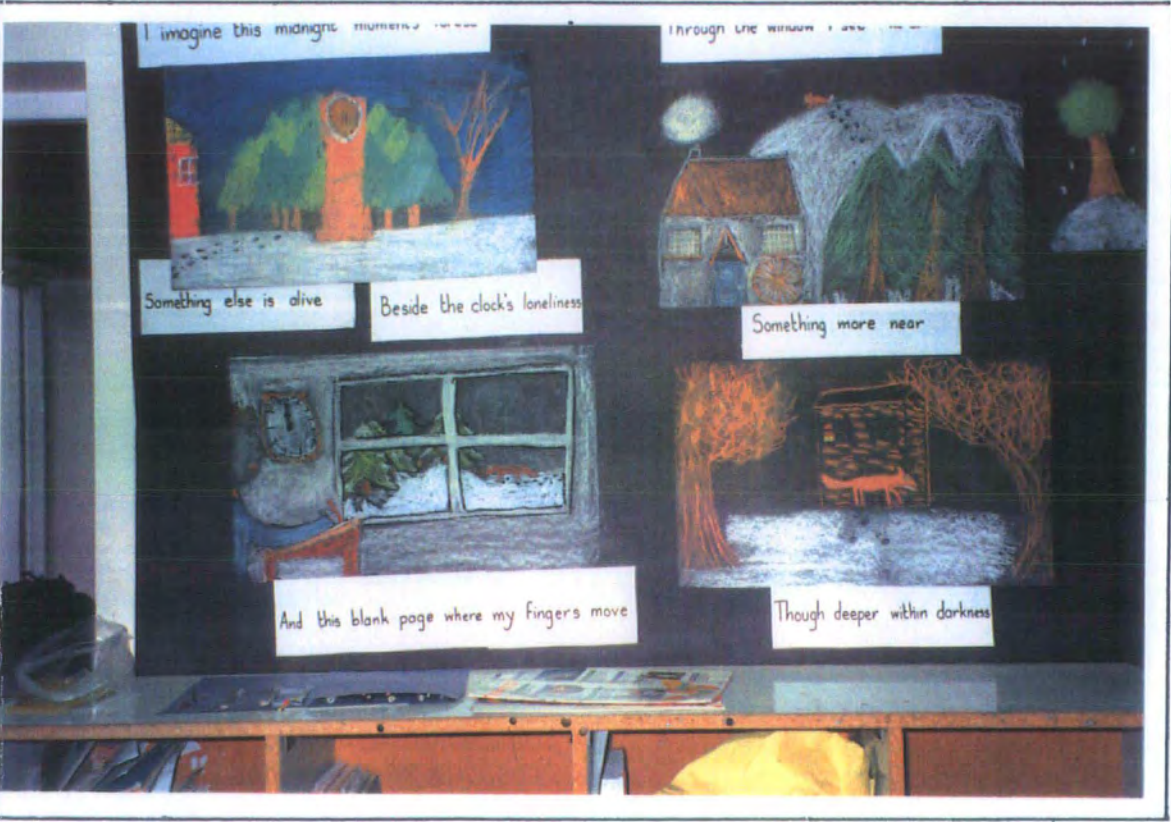


D



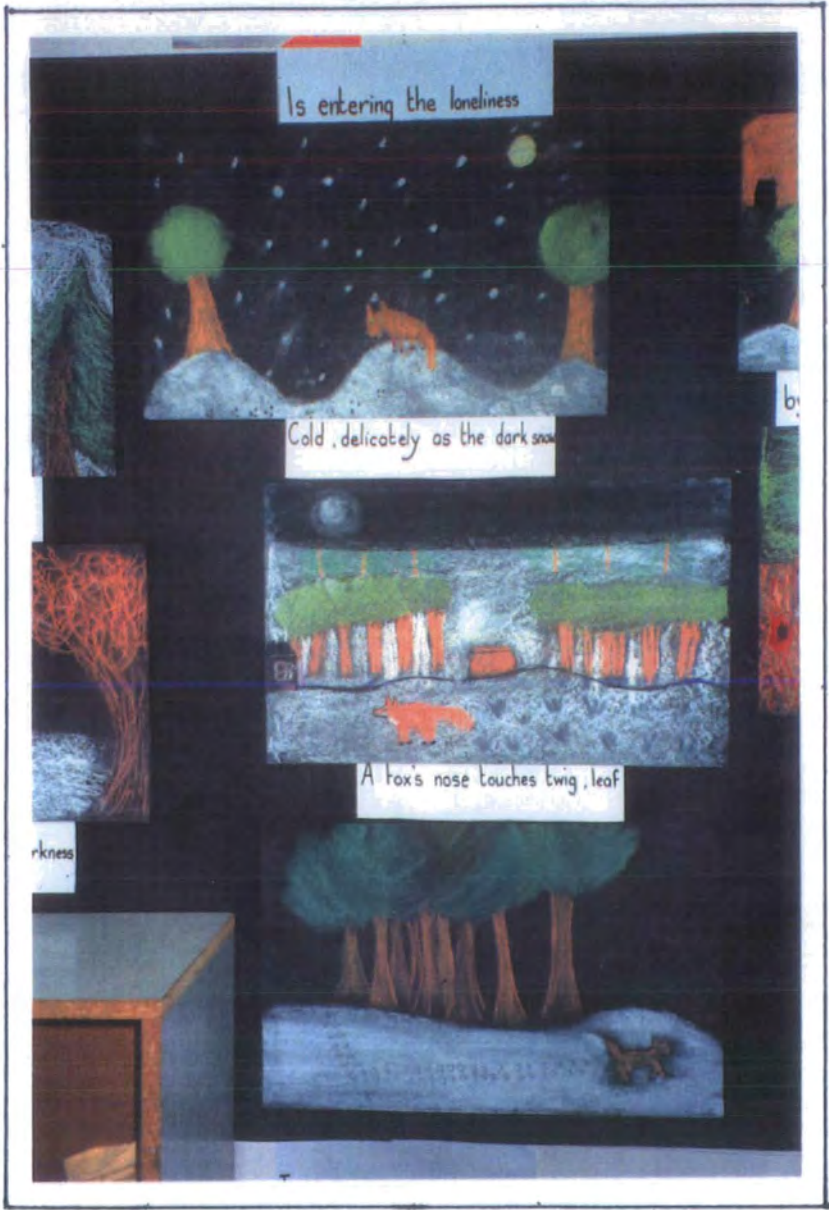
E

G



H

I



Is entering the loneliness

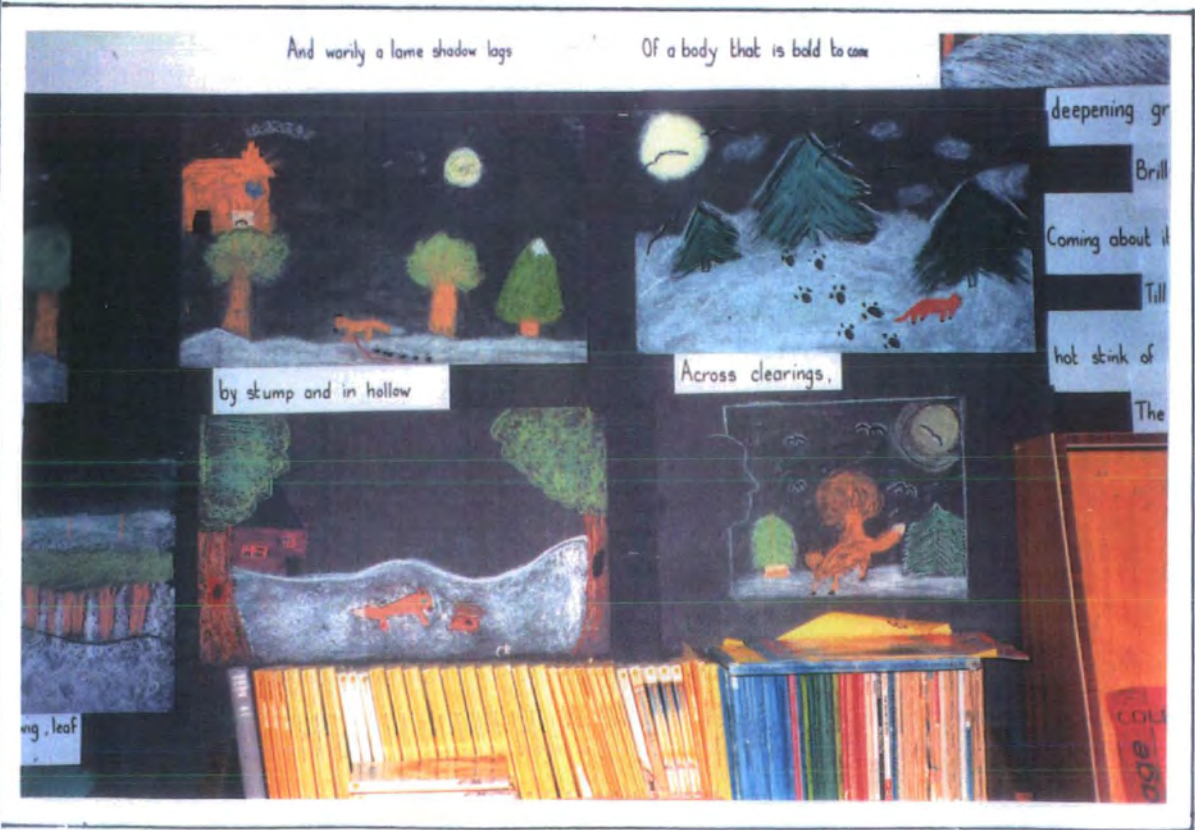
Cold, delicately as the dark snow

A fox's nose touches twig, leaf

J

K

L



And warily a lame shadow lags

Of a body that is bold to come

by stump and in hollow

Across clearings,

deepening gr

Brill

Coming about it

Till

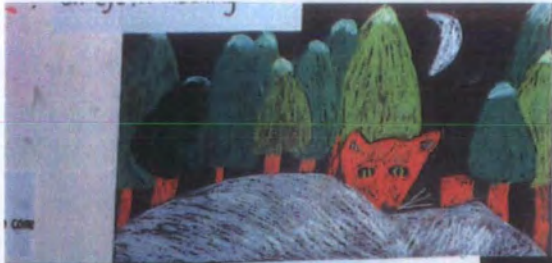
hot stink of

The

N

O

Q



deepening greenness

The window is starless still:

Brilliantly, concentratedly

The clock ticks

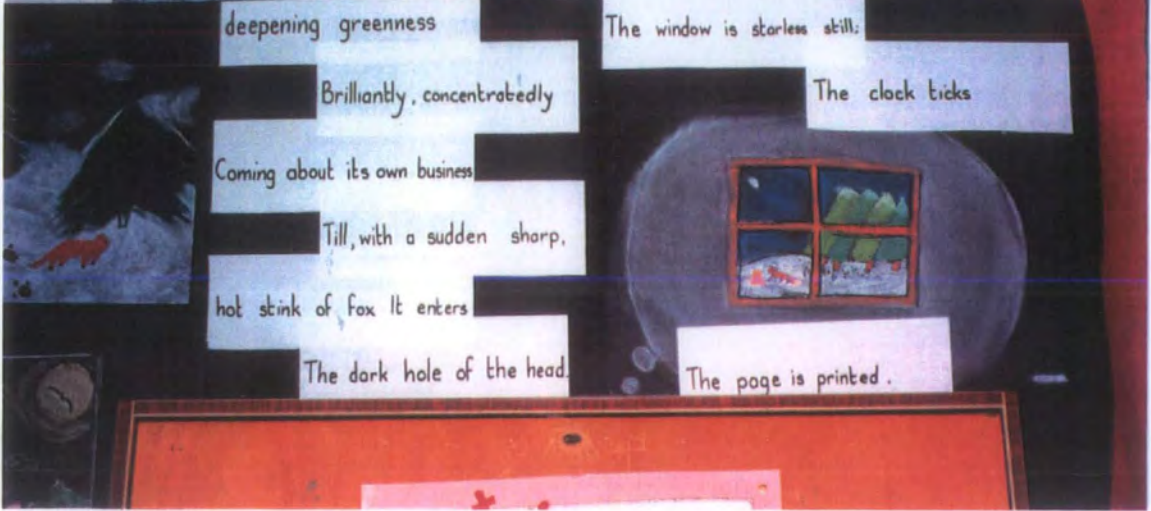
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp,

hot stink of fox It enters

The dark hole of the head.

The page is printed.



R

