

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

A COMMUNITY OF READERS AT WORK

by

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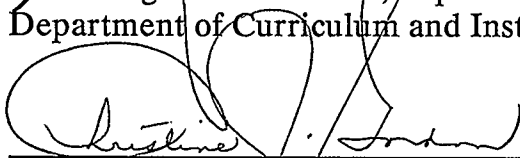
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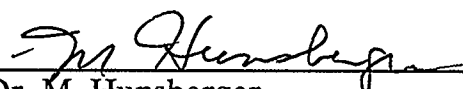
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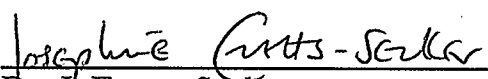
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ABSTRACT

This study was sparked by recent interest in the establishment of upper elementary classrooms as places where young readers may work collaboratively with friends and teacher to become better readers. Its purpose was to develop an understanding of the reading and responses to literature of ten and eleven year old children in such an environment.

Guided by an assumption that response to literature develops from what readers themselves experience in relation to the text, a naturalistic approach and the techniques of ethnography were used to explore the context in which the children read, their views of reading, the nature of their engagements with text, and the influence of classroom talk on their literary experiences and understandings. Seven students, four girls and three boys acted as key informants.

Over a nine month period, the researcher was a participant observer in the classroom. Data from field notes, transcriptions of interviews and conference group discussions, school documents, and classroom artifacts were analyzed on an ongoing basis in order to direct the study. A further, more intensive analysis of the data followed after school ended in June.

Findings from these analyses indicated that given time in class to read and talk with others, choice of texts, and freedom to respond according to personal interpretations, the children enjoyed reading, read widely, and used their senses, feelings and imaginations to help them re-create texts. Additionally, the children's talk in

conference groups supported their attempts to engage with texts, enabled them to share their engagements, and on a limited basis, to reflect on them.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my son Mark - for it was with him that I began to learn about reading.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

...no matter how good the writing may be, a book is never complete until it is read. The writer does not pass through the gates of excellence alone, but in the company of readers.

Katherine Paterson (1989, p.37)

Rich encounters with books, where true music begins, occur when "the deepest sound going forth from [the author's] heart meets the deepest sound coming forth from [the reader's]" (Paterson, 1989, p. 37). Louise M. Rosenblatt (1978) would describe this literary music making as a unique and personal transaction between reader/performer and text. The music they make together, the evocation, is particular to the time and circumstances of the meeting.

The foregoing quote serves as an appropriate entrée into this study because it was Paterson who first invited me, as a reader, to make music with her. Her enticement to experience possible worlds through children's literature, inspired me to invite my students to read and experience "live circuits" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 14) with good books. My own classroom experiences with children and books, along with Rosenblatt's transactional views on response, stimulated the thinking that has not only shaped this research, but has also provided a broad focus for the study itself.

Purpose of the Study

Within the frame of reference described above, and guided by the questions that will be outlined below, this study proposed to develop an understanding of the responses to literature, of a group of upper elementary boys and girls, as they read self-selected texts in small conference groups within their classroom *Community of Readers* (this term describes a classroom context wherein a sense of collaboration develops amongst all readers). In seeking to interpret or illuminate the reading and responses of these children within the context of their classroom, this study's purpose was to contribute to understanding reading instruction that is based on children's literature and their responses to it.

Guiding Questions

During the data collection phases of the study, my initial thoughts about children reading and responding to literature were shaped, tested and revised as I listened to the children and the teacher talk about books and reading, and observed the workings of the classroom. As a result of this synthesis, the following questions served as a framework for the study and guided my selection of information:

1. What is the children's view of reading?
2. What is the nature of the children's engagements with text?
3. How does talk in conference groups influence the construction of meaning?

Theoretical Starting Points

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory

Rosenblatt's (1978, 1980, 1982, 1990) "transactional theory", which focuses on the "lived-through" experience and affirms the importance of the reader, was first presented in *Literature as exploration* in 1938 (reprinted 1968), and developed more fully in her 1978 book *The reader, the text, the poem*. It was a conviction about the difference between "literary" and other reading, that led Rosenblatt to the development of a "reader-oriented" theory of literature. Because it emphasized the importance of the reader's contribution in the literary experience, it challenged accepted practices and philosophies, and is considered seminal to the field of *reader-response* criticism (Tompkins, 1980).

In keeping with this view, Rosenblatt describes every reading act as an event:

a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular configuration of marks on a page, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context. Certain organismic states, certain ranges of feeling, certain verbal or symbolic linkages, are stirred up in the linguistic reservoir. From these activated areas, selective attention...picks out elements that synthesize or blend into what constitutes "meaning". Meaning does not reside ready-made in the text or in the reader; it happens during the transaction between reader and text. (1989, p.157)

The result of this unique transaction between reader and text is what Rosenblatt refers to as "the poem" (1978). Iser (1978) calls it "the virtual text", asserting that the literary work is actualized as the reader "receives" the message by composing it. Meaning then, or interpretation of literary text, emerges as a result of this coming

together of a reader and a text. The resulting evocation, and the reader's response to the evocation becomes the object of literary study (Rosenblatt, 1978).

According to Rosenblatt (1978), any reading event can, on the basis of what the reader does, be characterized as primarily efferent or aesthetic. In a transactional relationship, where reader and text are conditioned by, and condition each other, the reader either focuses on what has to be remembered later - i.e. information to be carried away from the text (efferent reading), or attends to all aspects, both cognitive and affective, of the experience being evoked during the reading (aesthetic reading). It is out of aesthetic involvement with text, that the reader evokes under the guidance of the text, his/her personal, lived-through experience, referred to above as "the poem".

Efferent reading is at one end of a linguistic continuum, with aesthetic at the other. The reader, in approaching a text, must choose an appropriate stance - either a predominantly efferent one or a predominantly aesthetic one. Where the reading falls along the continuum determines "the mix of public and private elements of sense" (Rosenblatt, 1989, p. 158) that the reader attends to, and that which emerges from the reading. A text can be read either efferently or aesthetically, according to the reader's focus of attention. Live circuits with good books are electrified through aesthetic involvement with text, where the reader seeks his/her own "poem", based not only on the abstract concepts that the words of the text point to (the public elements), but also on the personal feelings, associations, images and ideas that are stirred up within, during the reading (the private elements).

"Once the work has been evoked, it can become the object of reflection and analysis, according to various critical and scholarly approaches" (Rosenblatt, 1990, p. 106, emphasis as per original). Rosenblatt (1980, 1982) argues that it is the evoking of the work, however, - children's reading for the aesthetic experience - that has been neglected in our schools. Children often read, seeking information that will satisfy the efferent demands and questions of teachers, or focusing on what teachers think they ought to experience. Rosenblatt (quoted in Wilson, 1981) contends that they have never "learned to pay attention to their own inner experience" (p.7), and often find themselves in discussions of literary works that do not exist for them.

Bruner's Narrative Thought

From Rosenblatt's (quoted in Wilson, 1981) perspective "literary works embody human life and are especially concerned with conflicts or tensions in values" (p.9). Bruner (1986) suggests, that when readers slip into the possible world of texts, they focus on the "vicissitudes of human intention" (p.17) associated with these conflicts or tensions, and are subsequently drawn into the act of thinking. This narrative thought, that Bruner values as highly as the ordered thought of the scientist, leads, he contends, to a fuller understanding of the human experience.

Langer's Envisionment Building

Langer (1990) describes the approaches a reader uses in developing understanding when s/he "becomes personally enmeshed in the text world...responding on a subjective plane...to the events, emotions, and intricacies of human life" (pp.230 & 233). From Langer's perspective, the reader "at any point in a reading...has a local envisionment,

a personal text-world embodying all s/he understands, assumes, or imagines up to that point in the reading" (pp. 231-232). This envisionment, however, is subject to change as the reader's stance, or way in which she or he relates to the text, changes. The focus of the reader's concerns differs from one stance to another, with each therefore contributing a different dimension to understanding.

Langer (1990) identifies these four stances as:

being out and stepping into an envisionment, where readers make the connections necessary to begin to construct an envisionment;

being in and moving through an envisionment, where they use their envisionments to inform their growing understandings;

stepping back and rethinking what one knows, where they use their envisionments to reflect on personal experience, ideas, or knowledge; and

stepping out and objectifying the experience, where they look critically at their envisionments, their reading experiences, and the text itself. (p.254)

These stances are recursive rather than linear, in that they have the potential of recurring at any point during the reading.

Implications. Bruner's (1986) elevating of narrative thought, and Langer's (1990) descriptions of the nature of literary understanding, support and extend, for me, Rosenblatt's (1978) notions of reader response. Her transactional theory, which stresses an active two-way relationship between reader and text, has helped me to understand the process readers engage in during literary transactions, and inspired me to explore how young readers may develop "the habit of aesthetic evocation from a text" (Rosenblatt, 1985b). Bruner's (1986) argument for a narrative mode of cognition, in addition to the

widely accepted paradigmatic mode, lends support to the value of readers reflecting on their personal experiences with text. Further to this, Langer (1990, 1991) offers a way of looking at how children's extended thinking leads to developing understanding and fuller responses to the books they read.

Helping students reach fuller responses - to grow from whatever they make of texts into more and more complete transactions with them, is a responsibility that teachers need to feel (Rosenblatt, 1968). As Rosenblatt (quoted in Wilson 1981) asserts, "students should be able ultimately to read better, to do greater justice to the text" (p.8). She adds that "the more [we] can lead students to develop habits of aesthetic reading and to become self-critical, the better [we]'ll be able to help them to improve their reading" (p.9).

Choosing a Classroom

In choosing a classroom for study, I looked for a community of learners wherein teacher and children collaborated, learning and inspiring one another to make "live circuits with good books" and to seek their own "poems". A consultant friend put me in touch with a number of teachers who, in his view, had established in their classrooms, supportive Communities of Readers. As my heart is with ten and eleven year old children, I contacted the teacher of a grade five/six split class. She was very interested in my research proposal and invited me to visit her classroom.

Upon visiting I found that there was a variety of literature available to the children, time each day for them to choose and read it, and the opportunity for them to respond in journals and to talk openly and honestly about the books they were reading

with fellow classmates and with the teacher. I felt that within such a setting, children might well reveal their aesthetic sensitivities and capabilities, and attempt to make meaning that derived from their attention to the sounds, images and ideas triggered within them by the books they chose to read. The teacher agreed to have me join the class as a participant/observer.

Methodological Framework

This study attempted to come to an understanding of how upper elementary boys and girls, as members of a Community of Readers and functioning within a classroom *Reading Workshop*¹, responded to literature. Since the emphasis was on children's transactions with text (Rosenblatt, 1978) within a particular setting, participant observation was utilized as the major method of data collection (Spradley, 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Immersed in the life-world of the classroom (Boyce, 1981), I was able to develop an interpretation of the children's reading and responses that corresponded to this particular situation.

During the course of the study, I took extensive field notes, interviewed the children, the teacher and one parent, observed them unobtrusively as they took part in the activities of the Reading Workshop, read from their response journals, and participated with them in their conference groups. As I read and re-read my field notes, transcripts of interviews and conference group discussions, and artifacts, in order to gain a thorough familiarity with them, I used the data to think (Hammersley & Atkinson,

¹ A classroom structured as a Reading Workshop (Atwell, 1987), allows children to behave as real readers.

1983) - shaping, testing and revising my thoughts about the children's reading and responding.

I looked to see what patterns of behaviour, experience and expression might be identified, what surprised and puzzled me, how the data related to my expectations (which were based on both my prior experiences with children and the theory outlined above), and whether there were inconsistencies or contradictions in the children's behaviour and expression, or between what the teacher said and what she did. This process of synthesis led to my constructions of meaning about the children's reading and responding. Always, I was led back to the children and the teacher, to confirm, extend, revise and clarify my thinking. The meaning I made developed out of my transactions with them.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to this study:

1. Restricting the focus of the study to one particular classroom restrains the transferability of the findings. As an example of an upper-elementary classroom, it may not be typical.
2. Although thick description was used to report the reading and response experiences of these particular children, it does not do justice to the fullness of the classroom, thus restricting others who might wish to apply the findings to other classroom situations.
3. Many of the data collected were dependent not only on the children's ability to articulate their awareness of engagements with texts and their responses to the books

they were reading, but also on their willingness to share what they were experiencing and thinking.

4. Whereas the nine months spent in the classroom facilitated my understanding of the children's reading and responses, the length of engagement remains a limitation of the study.

Significance of the Study

There is a growing interest, on the part of teachers in elementary classrooms, in the use of literature-based reading programs which are organized around a Community of Readers, or structured as a Reading Workshop. Although the individual responses of elementary children to literature and the sharing of responses to literature within groups has of late received some attention in the research (Eeds & Wells, 1989), the transactional theory of reading, along with related theories, and their implications for teaching in upper elementary classrooms where literature is the central focus of the reading program, has not been fully detailed nor explored in the research to date.

As teachers turn to literature and invite response from their students, questions about how to meet responses, what to encourage and discourage, and how to shape subsequent interventions arise. This study proposed to explore the aesthetic reading and responses of upper elementary children from this perspective, in an attempt to form a conceptualization of instruction in upper elementary classrooms, instruction that supports and enhances children's growth in the aesthetic reading of literature and enables them "to pass through the gates of excellence".

Overview

In Chapter II the concepts of Reading Workshop, Community of Readers, and *Literature Circles* are explicated. Chapter III details the methods and procedures by which the study was carried out. The analysis of the data is presented in Chapter IV, while Chapter V offers the findings, suggests their implications for instruction, and makes suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II

Reading Workshop, Community of Readers, and Literature Circles

Introduction

Literature can take us out of ourselves and return us to ourselves - slightly different with each book we have loved. It lies within the power of every teacher and librarian to give children rich experiences with literature...We must do more than just teach our students to read. We must help them become readers who are completely absorbed in their books and look forward to a lifetime of pleasure in reading good books.

(Huck, 1990, p. 12)

Increasingly, elementary teachers are turning to literature in order to help their students develop that which Huck (1990) terms a reading habit. "To make sure that the right [book] gets to the right reader at the right time" (Halpern, 1987, p. 269), teachers are sharing the responsibilities of teaching with their students. The term Community of Readers is often used to describe a classroom situation where text, readers and teacher meet in collaborative ways. One way to develop a Community of Readers is to organize the classroom as a Reading Workshop. Literature Circles, as a component of Readers' Workshop brings readers together in small groups to discuss a book. This chapter traces the development of the concepts of Readers' Workshop, Community of Readers, and Literature Circles, in an attempt to show their inter-relatedness, and how the principles that underlie them have guided teachers in establishing places for children to read and be readers, places which capitalize on "the power of literature and the power of social interactions in collaborative communities" (Short & Pierce, 1990, p. vii).

Reading Workshop

In 1987, Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* was published. It is her story of how she learned to learn from her eighth grade students when she organized her classroom as a reading and writing workshop at Boothbay Elementary School in Boothbay Harbour, Maine. She established her classroom as a place for reading - a place where readers could work at meaning-making in the literate environment of a Reading Workshop².

Atwell's classroom, which could be viewed as the prototypical Reading Workshop, supports reading and readers, and serves to develop in them a lifelong love of reading. By surrounding her eighth graders with literature and allowing them to choose the books they would read, she offered them pleasure, fluency, and involvement. They helped themselves. When she abandoned her deficit model perspective and focused on what they could do as readers, her students learned because of her attention and collaboration, and she learned from her observations, and subsequent reflections.

There is a predictable structure to the Reading Workshop. Time for mini-lessons, sustained silent reading, and written responses to literature in dialogue journals is consistently provided for. In her mini-lessons that launched the Reading Workshop each day, Atwell presented procedural information, introduced literary elements, authors and genres, and shared practices of good readers. These whole class meetings which lasted for five to ten minutes, were designed to "provide a taste or an invitation rather than a dissection or dissertation" (Atwell, 1987, p. 167). Mary Ellen Giacobbe's (1986) three

² Reading Workshop and Readers' Workshop are used here interchangeably to reflect the same meaning.

basics of time, ownership, and response were brought together during the remainder of the Reading Workshop.

Atwell recognized that, in light of her adolescent students' preoccupation with peers, participation in extra-curricular activities, and commitments to part-time jobs, reading did not often happen for them away from school. She made time each day (45 minutes) in the Reading Workshop, for silent, independent reading, so that it would happen at school. She knew that fluency was a function of sustained experiences with texts (Smith, 1971), and that extended chunks of time were needed for students to "enter the world of literature and make it their own" (Atwell, 1987, p. 157). Making it their own also involved choice.

Atwell's eighth graders chose the books that hooked them on reading. In addition to works by Shakespeare, Dickens, Steinbeck, Twain and Hemingway, her classroom library was filled with titles by such authors as Robert Cormier, Lois Lowry, Susan Beth Pfeffer, Madeleine L'Engle, and Robert Lipsyte, authors of contemporary adolescent literature, whose writing reflected adolescent perspectives, and was, in her view, "exquisite". She felt that there was a need to provide her students with choices. From her perspective this was a necessary step towards their understanding and appreciation of literature. What she learned from them was that freedom of choice increased their reading rate and comprehension, and turned them into readers.

As readers, Atwell's students also needed opportunities for literary talk, and occasions to respond: this she provided. Initially, she attempted one-on-one reading conferences as a means for response during the Workshop, but discovered that "there

wasn't enough time or teacher to go around" (1987, p. 164). The individual discussions she did manage to orchestrate seldom moved beyond a quick plot synopsis. Her solution was to initiate written dialogues "because [she] had some hunches about the combined possibilities of writing as a way of reflecting on reading, and teacher-learner correspondence as a way of extending and enriching reflection through collaboration" (1987, p. 165). Her exchanges with students in dialogue journals confirmed her hunches. Their "written responses...[went] deeper than their talk" (Atwell, 1987, p. 165), for together in dialogue journals, she and her students gave:

accounts of [their] processes as readers...speculate[d] on authors' processes as writers...suggested revisions to what [they'd] read...[saw] connections between a published author's work and [their] own writing...[saw] connections between books and [their] own lives...and engage[d] in some serious, and not so serious literary gossip.

(Atwell, 1987, p. 165).

By fitting time, ownership, and response together into the activities or "demonstrations" (Frank Smith's (1982) word for incidents of teaching, p. 171-2) described above, Atwell communicated inadvertent messages about reading to her eighth graders, and presented them with a model of The Good Reader that was built upon personal meaning and a love of books. She invited her eighth graders' minds to meet books, and helped them discover reading as meaning-making. Breaking with tradition, and taking her lead from Alan Purves (1972), she placed the students' responses at the centre of her curriculum. Moreover, she paid attention to the personal meanings that they made and re-made as they read, and she collaborated with them as they explored and shaped new meanings. She built up a literary relationship with each one of her

students, and, as a result, their knowledge of literature grew: from the opportunities they had to talk with her through dialogue journals, from her talk in mini-lessons, and from their own experiences as readers of literature.

In each day's Reading Workshop, Atwell's students saw the uses of literacy in the following way:

reading as a whole, sense-making activity, and written texts as open books - wide open to kids' opinions, questions, and interpretations. They [saw] all students' rights as literate human beings and they [saw] around them a community of readers in action. Before their eyes, in the midst of their community, they [saw] a new model of The Good Reader emerge.

(1987, p. 168).

The evolution in Atwell's teaching that resulted in the creation of a Community of Readers did not occur overnight. Taking her lead from Graves' (1983) observations of children in classrooms, in the process of writing, Atwell began sharing responsibility with her students. In the process of coming out from behind her desk to read with, observe and learn from her students, she discovered the circumstances that allowed and supported them to find their ways inside reading. Atwell's book *In the Middle* is a clear account of what she and her students did, and why. It has enabled other teachers to emulate her methods, to implement, modify and broaden them in order to make Reading Workshop their own.

As an example, in 1988, the editors of *English Journal* invited classroom teachers to respond to and report on their extensions of *In the Middle*. The "outpouring of manuscripts" that were received persuaded the editors that "teachers [were] emulating Atwell's methods, applying them, adapting them, extending them, and investigating how

students learn and how they as teachers can best teach" (Nelms, 1989). A selection of these manuscripts was published in the January 1989 "EJ Focus" section of *English Journal*.

At a local level, a monograph entitled *Looking in on...Readers' Workshop*, and published by the Calgary and District Council of the International Reading Association (1990), "serves as evidence of a new confidence that derives from the knowledge that child/teacher and peer collaboration are the bases for establishing a secure community of learners" (Braun, 1990). In the introduction to the monograph, the editor, Terry MacKenzie, reports on the "school-based, year-long professional plans [within Calgary and district schools] devoted to building a 'community of readers' and there are study groups, workshops and in-service programs centred on Readers' Workshops" (MacKenzie, 1990, p.7). Miss Atkins, the teacher whose classroom was the setting for this research, was often a presenter at these workshops and in-service programs.

Community of Readers

It was through literacy-based activities that a sense of community developed in Atwell's workshop-style classroom, a Community of Readers similar to the ones described by Hepler and Hickman (1982). Specifically, the idea of a Community of Readers allowed Hepler & Hickman (1982) "to talk about how children, in alliance with friends and teacher, work together to help each other learn to read" (p. 279).

It was through their observations of middle grade children in the classroom, where they saw children reading for pleasure and learning to read by reading books in

a Community of Readers, that they were led to an understanding of the functions of such a community, and its value for members.

In the first instance, the children they observed used peer recommendations to choose books, depending on the formal and informal testimonies of fellow readers to help them decide what to read.

In addition to the foregoing, loose alliances formed amongst children within the larger classroom community. Sharing an enthusiasm for reading, they read together, asked and answered each others' questions, and talked their way to meaning through their attempts to explain themselves and their reading to one another. Although the children's assertions were often "disorganized, inarticulately framed, confused, or complex" (Hepler & Hickman, 1982, p. 281), the statements revealed, nonetheless, that the children were developing an awareness of how literature works.

As well, Hepler & Hickman (1982) observed that the Community of Readers sanctioned and nurtured the response activities of the children, activities such as drama, writing and drawing which allowed further exploration of meaning beyond talk.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Community of Readers answered the question "why would anyone want to read" by providing a model of reading behaviour - readers enjoying books, and demonstrating their enjoyment through talk and actions. The teacher, as part of the community, "listen[ed], acknowledge[ed], and rejoice[ed] in children's good experiences" (Hepler & Hickman, 1982, p. 282), and helped them to see their reading within a wide literary framework. As Meek (1982) suggested in *Learning to read*, "the enthusiasm of a trusted adult can make the difference" (p. 193). Interested

adults joined the company of fellow readers, influencing and supporting the children as they "picked their way to literacy" (Meek, 1982).

From Hepler & Hickman's (1982) descriptions, talk to clarify and extend meaning, to express enjoyment, to pass on a good book, and to support response, seemed to tie the communities they observed together and to advance reading as an individual yet essentially social enterprise.

Reading Workshop and Community of Readers: Some Links

The similarity between Nancie Atwell's (1987) classroom and the middle grade classrooms that Hepler & Hickman (1982) observed lies not only in the answer to the question of "why would anyone want to read" but also in the collaborative approach to learning that resulted in "a company of fellow readers" negotiating meaning with text, and using dialogue (talk or journal exchange) to learn. In such classrooms, language is used as a medium of learning (Barnes, 1976), learning which is directed towards making sense of literature rather than at satisfying the efferent demands of the teacher (Rosenblatt, 1978).

While Atwell (1987) chose written language in dialogue journals as a medium of learning, the teachers in the classrooms that Hepler & Hickman (1982) observed accepted the "exploratory talk" (Barnes, 1990) that naturally occurred as the children formed themselves into loose groups to read books. In both cases, however, the children "worked on understanding", focusing their exchanges, be it with the teacher in a response journal, or with one another in the loose alliances that they formed, on issues that they themselves needed to clarify.

Literature Circles

Adele Fiderer (1990), writing in a "themed annual about literacy issues" entitled *Workshop 2*, shared how her students chose their own books, read them in class, and wrote to her about their reading. As she struggled to make Reading Workshop her own, she "began to look for a way to extend reading workshop to include purposeful, collaborative talk within a predictable, organized structure" (Fiderer, 1990, p. 76). Similarly, by providing their first-grade children with "30 minutes a day to read books they chose either with a partner or alone", Short & Kauffman (1988, p. 106) felt that they had "done a good job of involving children in reading widely", but "what was missing was a way for children to explore intensely the meanings they were constructing during reading with other readers" (p. 106).

Applying understandings of how curriculum "must always build from and connect with children's life experiences as they author" (Short & Kauffman, 1988, p. 106), and incorporating ideas about literature groups learned from Karen Smith (1990), a sixth grade teacher from Arizona, Short & Kauffman (1988) developed the concept of Literature Circles thus formalizing the exchanges amongst children that Hepler & Hickman (1982) spoke of in their article.

Short & Kauffman (1988) saw Literature Circles as a way to give "readers the opportunity they needed to explore half-formed ideas with others and to revise their understandings of a piece of literature through hearing other readers' interpretations" (Short & Kauffmann 1988, p. 107). "Good literature of interest to the students and with enough depth for discussion" (Short & Kauffmann 1988, p. 107) was chosen for

Literature Circles. In a sixth grade classroom, where chapter books were used, four or five children signed up to read a book. They came to a Literature Circle either having read the book all the way through, or as they were reading it. In the latter case, they met each day "to discuss what they read the previous day and to agree on how much they [would] read for the next meeting" (Short & Kauffmann 1988, p. 109). These daily meetings tended to be brief, so that the children could spend their time in class reading. Upon completing the book, the children "took several days for longer, more in-depth discussions" (Short & Kauffmann 1988, p. 109).

Initially the discussions were teacher led. Teachers asked open-ended questions and demonstrated discussion behaviours that they hoped would lead to the exploration of meaning. Although the direction of the discussions depended on "the children's interests and the strengths of the particular book" (Short & Kauffmann 1988, p. 109), the children were helped to make connections between the book and their own experiences, and other books they had read. Moreover, they were challenged to support any statements they made about the book.

As the children became comfortable with expressing their thoughts and opinions, and exploring their interpretations of literature, Short & Kauffmann found that the Circles ran without their continued presence. The children determined their own focus and developed questions to ask of one another, as they carried on their own discussions.

Just as Atwell (1987) created a way in dialogue journals, and Hepler & Hickman's children established a way in the "loose alliances" they formed, Short & Kauffmann found in Literature Circles a collaborative way for children to explore their

interpretations and reach new understandings as they deepened, extended, and revised the meaning they had constructed from their reading. Discussion groups similar in nature to those developed by Short & Kauffmann have made their way into Reading Workshop³ (Gilles, 1989; MacKenzie, 1990; Short & Pierce (Eds.), 1990), as teachers exercise their belief in "the power of dialogue within a community of learners" (Short & Pierce, 1990, p. vii).

Recent research by Eeds and Wells (1989), "investigated what happened in literature study groups composed of 5th and 6th grade students and led by teachers in training" (Eeds & Wells, 1989, p. 4). In order to escape the "inquisition mode" that pervades much literary discussion, Eeds & Wells (1989) set up the groups and encouraged the students and the teacher-in-training leaders to share their personal transactions with a text they had chosen to read. Their hope was that dialogue might emerge, as the groups "address[ed] themselves to literary issues" (p.14) so that "grand conversations" (p.4) might prevail. The time that groups spent constructing simple meaning, sharing personal stories, engaging in active inquiry (interpreting, hypothesizing, predicting and verifying), and critiquing their books helped individuals to confirm, extend and modify their individual interpretations, thus creating a better understanding of text (Eeds & Wells, 1989, p.27).

Eeds & Wells' (1989) findings supported Golden's (1986) assertion that "talk functions in important ways to foster understanding of the text and to provide a forum for articulating meaning" (Golden, p.95) . How grand these discussions were is perhaps

³ See Appendix A for a possible daily plan for a Readers' Workshop.

a matter of debate. Eeds and Wells, however, were pleased with their findings and felt that the group members "participated in rich discussions of works of literature which revealed that they were capable of" (p.27) building meaning together.

Gilles (1990), studying seventh-grade students in learning disability resource rooms also found that emerging naturally in students' discussions were elements of literature such as "retelling or summarizing the plot; discussing the characters; discussing the setting, the mood, the author's style, and possible themes or symbols" (p. 56). The students also used the discussion groups to discuss the reading process. Gilles concluded her study by stating that "given authentic experiences with literacy in a climate where one's opinion does count, these youngsters appeared *abled*, not disabled" (p. 67).

Discussion

In a recent conference presentation, Atwell (1990) warned teachers adopting and extending the aforementioned concepts that "making the shift from text books to trade books requires more than trading one set of books for another". Although the problems of organization, finding time to read in an already packed school day, having enough books for students to read, becoming familiar with students background and lives, and teaching them the book choosing/reading strategies and discussion skills that they need are substantial, Atwell (1990) believes that the real challenge of a Reading Workshop approach lies in determining "the kind of responses to reading that we encourage, or discourage, and the ways that we meet a child's response". What Atwell implies, I believe, is that the shift from textbooks to trade books must be accompanied by a coming to terms with what it is that we value in literary experience for our students, for it is this

understanding and knowing that will determine what we do with the literature we turn to, and the responses that we accept and encourage from our students. Many teachers struggle in this process.

Teachers may find themselves in two different scenarios as they move uncertainly from a basal reader program to a literature based program. In the first, their practice remains text centred, as they continue to ask basal type questions aimed at determining whether the children have read and read "correctly". Literature is thus treated as a body of knowledge, "something to know 'about', something to summarize or analyze or define, something to identify as one might identify the different constellations on a star map" (Rosenblatt, 1968, p.59). Admitting the reader into our focus of attention, however, often leads to the second scenario, where teachers encourage spontaneous response and accept as legitimate any responses that the children offer. By encouraging and accepting such response, "the teacher's role becomes one of standing unobtrusively to one side, uninterfering and humble in the face of the seeming authority of students' private response" (Harker, 1990, p.70).

Rosenblatt (1968) counsels that children's spontaneous responses, that are often articulated as reactions, likes and dislikes, "should be the first step toward increasingly mature primary reactions" (p. 75). Students still need "to acquire mental habits that will lead to literary insight, critical judgement, and ethical and social understanding" (Rosenblatt, 1968, p.75). In reviewing the literature pertinent to Community of Readers within upper elementary classrooms, I have not found widespread evidence of children developing what Rosenblatt calls their critical powers. The talk in student-directed,

and/or teacher led Literature Circles does not often turn young readers back to the literature and involve them in prolonged engagements wherein they look critically at their own reactions, on the one hand, and perceptively at all that the text has to offer, on the other. Our ability, as teachers, to bring our students to this critical phase of the response process may, in Nancie Atwell's words "make or break the literature based reading program" (1990).

Writing in 1984 to suggest "an approach to teaching literature in the secondary schools that pays close attention to the reader" (p.xii), Probst postulates that a "vacillation back and forth from student-centred to discipline centred has produced...uncertainty about the fundamental purposes, and appropriate focus of the literature curriculum [which in turn] create[s] problems with planning" (p. 194-5). For upper elementary teachers planning what they will do with the literature they turn to, Rosenblatt (1978) offers a conception of the teaching of literature that rests on students:

- 1) adopting an appropriate stance that will allow for a vital personal experience,
- 2) reflecting on their spontaneous reactions,
- 3) attempting to understand what in the work and what in themselves produced their reactions, and
- 4) modifying, rejecting or accepting their reactions on the basis of this thinking.

Children developing these critical powers are enabled to "make each literary experience the source of enhanced capacities for [their] next experience[s] (Rosenblatt, 1968, p.76).

From Rosenblatt's (1968) perspective then, the shift from text books to trade books must be accompanied by the "creation of a situation favourable to a vital

experience" (p.61), opportunities for the "informal, friendly, exchange" of responses and reflections, and initiation into a process through which responses are clarified and enlarged.

Summary

In this chapter an attempt has been made to explicate the development of the concepts of Readers' Workshop, Community of Readers, and Literature Circles. Essentially, the terms are used to describe a common experience, i.e. that of readers transacting with texts and sharing interpretations.

Hepler & Hickman (1982) originally used the term Community of Readers to capture the collaborative flavour of classroom reading. It was the notion of a Community of Readers that drove Nancie Atwell to reshape the relationship she held with her eighth grade students, so that in learning from them what they knew, and about how they read and thought, she was enabled to affirm, challenge and extend their thinking. Within a Reading Workshop one is likely to see students reading individually or in groups, choosing books, writing to one another or to the teacher in response journals, and recommending books to one another. The teacher reads herself, provides instruction in the form of mini-lessons, conferences with the students either individually or in groups, and reads and writes in the students' response journals. Behind the scenes, she builds and maintains a classroom library, teaches the students how to discuss and to respond to the books they are choosing, and develops an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.

Literature Circles, as one aspect of a Readers' Workshop, were developed by Short & Kauffman (1988) to enable students to examine with others in a small group, their developing understandings, and to negotiate the meanings they are constructing.

Following Chapter III, which details the design of the study, Chapter IV looks specifically at Miss Atkins grade five/six classroom as an example of upper elementary teachers' attempts to make the shift from "text books to trade books", and to put into practice the principles of time, ownership and response as described by Atwell (1987), along with the principles of Literature Circles, as outlined by Short & Kauffman (1988).

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Introduction

This study proposed to develop an understanding of the aesthetic responses to literature of a group of ten and eleven year old boys and girls, as they read self-selected text in small conference groups within their upper elementary classroom Community of Readers. Given the emphasis on the children's interpretation of meaning within the context of their classroom, a naturalistic approach was employed. Participant observation was used as the primary means of data collection, as it allowed me to enter into the lives of the children, to observe them as they read and responded to literature, and to engage with them in activities appropriate to their Readers' Workshop.

In this chapter, the choice of the naturalistic mode is supported, the considerations that guided the selection of the classroom and informants explicated, the phases of data collection outlined, the analysis procedures described, and the techniques used to ensure trustworthiness laid out.

The Naturalistic Mode

Upon examining the assumptions that undergird the naturalistic mode of inquiry and those supporting a reader-response approach to reading, I saw clearly a correspondence between these sets of beliefs. In the first instance, the naturalistic paradigm assumes the existence of multiple, socially constructed realities. A researcher's insights are verified and/or challenged through the corroborative procedure of

triangulation. Similarly, reader-response theorists, in encouraging free and honest response, acknowledge the multiple meanings that readers may attach to words and literary experiences (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978). The individual reader becomes self-critical and grows towards literary understanding, however, within a Community of Readers that serves as a check to his personal, subjective interpretations of text (Ricoeur, 1979). Just as the researcher circles back with new questions, the reader returns to a text in order to discover his own selection and synthesis habits and to develop a critical awareness of his own reading processes (Rosenblatt, 1985a).

Additionally, an emphasis upon contextual elements is a distinguishing characteristic of naturalistic inquiry. The conclusions drawn by naturalists, in terms of understanding and explaining what people do, are context dependent. Comparably, Rosenblatt (1989) states that linguistic transactions "should be studied above all as a dynamic phenomenon in a particular context, as part of the ongoing life of the individual in a particular educational, social, and cultural environment" (p. 174).

Furthermore, naturalistic inquiry "provides a methodology which follows the contours of English teaching more closely than other approaches" (Kantor, Kirby & Goertz, 1981, p. 305). It is its emergent design that allowed me to refine and reshape my thinking, its concern with the construction of meanings, its consideration of the particulars of context, and the involvement with the children required by participation, that convinced me of the appropriateness of this approach to my study.

Selection of the Classroom and Informants

In selecting a classroom to study children's aesthetic reading, my primary consideration was to find a classroom that was, in harmony with transactional beliefs, reader-oriented. Accordingly, I looked for a classroom where the children experienced literature in a context of human interaction, where they were surrounded by many voices, reading, being read to, sharing and responding; where there was a variety of literature from which they could choose; and where there were opportunities for them to talk about their reading and the books they chose with their classmates and with the teacher.

A consultant friend was aware of several classrooms that seemed to reflect the atmosphere I was looking for. Since I particularly enjoy ten and eleven year old children, I contacted the teacher of an upper elementary classroom that he suggested. The teacher was very interested in my research proposal and invited me to visit her classroom. On visiting I found a teacher who loved books and reading and who organized her classroom as a Reading Workshop (Atwell, 1987) so that her students might behave as real readers, working at making meaning. Within the Workshop, she read to her students and talked with them about books and reading, invited them to choose books from a classroom collection, read herself during the time that she provided in class for them to read, and joined discussions as her students met in small conference groups to talk about their previous day's reading, to set goals for the next day, and/or to choose a new book.

I felt that within such a setting, children might well reveal their aesthetic sensitivities and capabilities, and attempt to make meaning that derived from their

attention to the sounds, images and ideas triggered within them by the books they chose to read. The teacher agreed to have me join the class as a participant observer. As the study progressed I became increasingly more involved with the children, joining in as they selected books, read, met in conference groups to discuss their reading experiences, and to set daily reading goals. Eventually, I connected with two of the small conference groups, and shared with each of them the experience of reading and discussing books we chose as a group. One group was comprised of three boys, two from grade five and one from grade six, while the other was made up of four grade six girls.

Phases of the Data Collection

The data for this study were collected, over a nine month period, by participant observation using the techniques of observation, interview, and artifact examination. My purpose as a participant observer was to watch what the members of this classroom did during the Readers' Workshop, to listen to their unsolicited and solicited comments, and to participate in their activities, so that I might come to some understanding of the Readers' Workshop as a context for reading and to insights into the children's reading and responses to literature.

Orientation and Overview Phase

Beginning in October of 1990, I entered the "orientation and overview" phase of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), visiting the classroom at least two times a week. The Readers' Workshop was scheduled daily, for an hour immediately after lunch. On each visit, I took up a post in the classroom from which I could make "grand tour" observations (Spradley, 1979) of the classroom proceedings, and talk informally with the

children and the teacher as they passed my way. The idea during this first phase was to get an overview of the Readers' Workshop, to grasp what went on in it, and to learn how it framed children's individual and group responses to the books they read.

My post was a large table positioned on the side of the classroom, opposite to the teacher's desk. A large ringed clipboard which was kept on this desk was used daily by the children to record their conference group's reading goal. This proved to be an advantageous location, as I had ready access to the children's names on the daily goal sheet, and the opportunity to chat informally with them as they came to record their group's goal for the next day. On these occasions, I initiated contact with the children.

From my post I also identified the major features of the classroom, characterized the teacher and the children, and described the activities that they engaged in during the Readers' Workshop. Beyond the physical place, the teacher and the children involved, and their related activities, I focused on the dimensions of time (the sequencing and duration of events); goals (what the teacher and children were trying to achieve); and feelings (emotions felt and expressed by the teacher and the children) (Spradley, 1979).

The data from my observations and engagements were recorded, *in situ*, as field notes. I was aware that I would later need to reproduce these data as they had become evident to me in the classroom, and so I attempted to make, whenever possible, a verbatim record of what the children and the teacher said. When condensed notes were taken, I focused on key phrases and major events, expanding and filling out the account after I had left the classroom.

In addition to this descriptive material, reflective information captured my personal account of this phase of the inquiry. These reflections included my feelings, impressions, hunches, problems and prejudices, and were related to method, analysis, ethical dilemmas, my own frame of mind, and points of clarification (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The taking of field notes kept me "alert and responsive"; permitted me to quickly return to an earlier point in my notes to refresh my memory of "what was said and seen"; enabled me to record my own thoughts, concerns and insights (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and to develop an awareness of my relationship to the setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In addition to the foregoing, my field notes also built a bridge between my observations and subsequent analysis (Spradley, 1979).

During this field entry phase I established and developed relationships with the children and their teacher. They were used to having visitors to their classroom, and as the children became accustomed to my presence they would greet me upon my arrival or wander over to my observation post to say hello. They observed me taking notes and were curious to know more about what I was doing.

My ongoing analysis unearthed patterns of behaviour, experience and expression which I sought to confirm and/or challenge, and led eventually to the next phase of the study, which began in February, 1991.

Focused Exploration Phase

At this time, I narrowed my focus from the whole of the Reader's Workshop context to specific groups of children within the Workshop, in order to gain some insight

into the nature of their reading and responses to literature. During this "focused exploration" phase (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I visited the classroom two to three times a week and left my post to mingle with the children as they chose books, and met in their conference groups to decide on a book, to set a group goal, and to discuss their reading. Eventually I targeted two conference groups, and asked the seven children who comprised the groups to act as informants. The children welcomed me and invited me to read with them.

I attempted to participate, as much as possible, as one of them, choosing books I thought we might enjoy, being part of the decision of what book to read, establishing daily goals, reading daily, and sharing my responses. In so doing, I experienced being both an insider and an outsider simultaneously (Spradley, 1979). Though I could never have become a complete participant in the Workshop (Spradley, 1979), I was immersed enough that taking field notes often interfered with my involvement. On these occasions I resorted to a hand-held, voice-activated tape recorder to capture what was said. The transcriptions of these tape-recorded sessions became part of the record I made of my observations and experiences, after I left the classroom.

As well, during this phase, I photocopied and studied classroom artifacts, read and listened to the children's creative writing, replied to half of the class in response journals, continued chatting informally with the children, and interviewed the informants, the teacher, the school principal, and a parent.

Throughout this phase, data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously and information was continually checked. I summarized what individuals

said, and sought their agreement, expansion or correction of my synopses. I asked for confirmation of, and challenges to my perceptions and interpretations, and corroborated information from one informant to another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member Checks Phase

Although this checking was an ongoing process, the final "member check" phase (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which extended from mid-May to the end of June, was specifically devoted to exposing the information analyzed from phase II to the scrutiny of the respondents. I sought, in this phase, to establish credibility, by clarifying, correcting and amplifying my notes so that it captured the data as constructed by those involved with this classroom. I visited the classroom once or twice a week in order to carry out this confirmation. To bring closure to the study, the write-up was then shaped into its final form.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data, which moved me from a collection of field notes, transcriptions, interview protocols and artifacts, to the production of this paper, was carried out on two levels: on one, analysis was ongoing, occurring concurrently with data collection and giving it direction, while on the other, a final analysis was begun after most of the data were in, and completed after I had left the classroom at the end of June (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

In-the-Field Analysis

I started my fieldwork with general questions about how a Reading Workshop approach might encourage children to read for the aesthetic experience. With this in

mind my initial observations focused on descriptions of the daily routine and schedule of the Workshop. After each classroom visit, these initial data were analyzed. I read over my field notes and reflected on the day's activities, discovering questions I wanted to pursue during the next day's data collection, and taking note of behaviours of the teacher and the children that seemed to recur. At this point in the study, the analysis served to guide the next day's data collection (Spradley, 1979).

Subsequent data were collected and analyzed and used to fill gaps, to confirm or disconfirm possible patterns of behaviour, and to discover even more gaps and questions. This repeating cycle and convolution of data collection and analysis "facilitated the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 242).

As possible patterns to the teacher's and children's behaviour emerged and were confirmed, I began to speculate on how this behaviour affected the children's reading and subsequent responses. Questions that arose about the children's view of reading and the nature of their engagements with text prompted me to direct my attention to the children's written responses in journals and to the talk that occurred as they met in conference groups. In this way, the ongoing analysis allowed me to move from the descriptive observations of the routine and schedule of the Readers' Workshop into the second phase of the study, where observations of conference groups and individual children within them were made. The research began to take on a focus, and I started to clarify my own purposes.

Ongoing analysis continued throughout the focused phase of the study, as I now looked for patterns of aesthetic involvement and expressions of response, and pursued leads with specific conference groups and/or individual readers in subsequent collection sessions that tested, revised and refined these patterns. As well, during this time, my ongoing reading of the substantive literature helped to shed further light on issues related to children's response to literature. From this reading, I was encouraged to attend to the developing nature of the children's responses, and to identify patterns of response that pointed to growth in their understanding and interpretations.

As I reviewed the data after each session in the classroom, I began highlighting sections that connected with previous data, or represented a recurrence or example of an emerging pattern, writing notes to myself in the margins, and "chunking" data that seemed to fit together in a separate notebook. These initial attempts to organize the data proved helpful and informative as I began the intensive process of discovering from the data, what was important, what was to be learned from it, and what I would present to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Post-site Analysis

The intensive data analysis began when most of the data were in and I had begun to withdraw from the site. With continuing access to the teacher and the children, however, I was able to return to them throughout the month of June, to confirm, extend, revise and clarify my thinking.

The post-site analysis, a process of data synthesis, involved the reading and re-reading of data from all sources in order to refine the patterns that had begun to emerge.

Throughout this process of refinement, I moved back and forth amongst the data sources, in order to corroborate the patterns. Patterns of response were guided by both Rosenblatt (1978) and Langer (1990,1991).

Once the patterns of behaviour, experience and expression were refined, the data were screened yet again for specific evidence of the patterns by way of examples in the children's own language. The resulting write-up represents my constructions of meaning about the children's reading and responding.

Planning for Trustworthiness

The operational techniques that were used to establish credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are described in this section. These four trustworthiness criteria have been proposed by Guba (1981) to test the rigor of a naturalistic inquiry.

Credibility seeks to establish a match between the constructed realities of the respondents and the researcher's reconstructions of those realities. The techniques that I used to increase the probability that such isomorphism occurred were:

- 1) *Prolonged engagement*: My substantial involvement over a nine month period with the children and the teacher in this classroom allowed me to establish a rapport with them and to gain their trust, to assess possible sources of distortion and to facilitate my understanding of the context of the Readers' Workshop.

- 2) *Persistent observation*: Sufficient observation enabled me to pursue in detail, the children's responses to literature, as the element of the Readers' Workshop deemed to be most salient.

3) *Peer debriefing*: I "tested out" my findings with several of my professors and with fellow graduate students. They pushed my thinking about my working hypotheses and methodological steps and helped me to make propositional, tacit information that I held.

4) *Negative case analysis*: I revised my working hypotheses in light of negative instances, refining and developing them until no further negative instances were found.

5) *Member checks*: Throughout the study, I continuously and informally tested hypotheses, data, possible patterns, and interpretations by seeking the reactions of the children and the teacher. Portions of the case report were formally tested to correct errors of fact and/or interpretation. Member checks is the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) as it verifies that what I presented reflected the constructions offered by the children and the teacher.

Transferability refers to the degree to which salient conditions of different contexts overlap or match. I provided as complete a data base as possible, using *thick description*, to facilitate others' transferability judgements.

In order to address dependability and confirmability I attempted, in the narrative of the case study, to document the process, the decisions I made as the design unfolded, and the salient factors in the context of the Readers' Workshop that led to those decisions and to my interpretations. An auditor was asked to attest to the dependability of the inquiry by determining from the *audit trail* the acceptability of the process of the investigation. Similarly, the auditor examined the data, interpretations, and findings of the study and attested that they could be tracked to the respondents of the classroom, thereby establishing the confirmability of the study.

Summary

To summarize, the similarities that underlie the naturalistic mode of inquiry and a reader-response approach to reading led me to a naturalistic approach. The particular classroom was chosen because the context for reading seemed to support readers and aesthetic reading. A series of three related data collection phases, during which I assumed the role of participant-observer, moved the study from a broad focus to the focused exploration of the children's responses to literature they were reading. On-going data analysis was followed by intensive analysis when most of the data had been gathered. Trustworthiness criteria proposed by Guba (1981) were used to establish the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Chapter four presents the analysis of the data. The study, which was designed to develop an understanding of upper elementary children's aesthetic involvement with, and responses to literature, began with a broad focus on the context within which the reading occurred. Hence, the first section of this chapter contextualizes the study by describing the Readers' Workshop as it functioned in this particular classroom. The seven members of two reading conference groups, with whom I connected during the study, are also introduced.

The patterns of behaviour that emerged from the ongoing analysis of the data collected during the focus on the Reading Workshop served to direct the study and to narrow its focus. My attention and thinking were directed to the children's view of reading, the nature of their engagements with texts, and the influence of talk in conference groups on the children's construction of meaning. The formulation of research questions, based on these emerging interests and thoughts guided my subsequent data gathering and analyses. What emerged were three levels of response that reflected the children's focus of attention and thinking. These levels in the response process are discussed in the second section of the chapter.

The Context for the Study

Readers' Workshop

Dropping into Miss Atkins' second floor, open-area classroom, just after lunch, any school day in October of 1990, one would have seen her, and the twenty-eight grade five and six children who were her students, settling in to read. Lucy was always the first to take her place, open her book, and slip back into the world she was constructing, blocking out as she went, the noise that emanated from the three adjacent classrooms. Robert was often seen on the floor in front of one of the many bookshelves, hoping that a book he might like to read would jump out at him. The BFG (a pseudonym) and Danny were always talking, distracting James, whose attention shifted back and forth from their conversation to his book. Robin sometimes wrote in his response journal, pausing to share a little tidbit with Jamie.

Miss Atkins seemed patient. She helped Robert settle on a book, separated the BFG and Danny, shared the tidbit with Robin and Jamie, and as the class silenced to read, she pulled up a stool at the front of the class, and sat down to read herself.

Upon returning to the same scene of independent reading in June of 1991, one might have noticed some differences. Miss Atkins sat on her stool at the front of the class reading. She took her place at the same time as the children. Robin, preferring to read in the surroundings of home, wrote in his response journal. Danny, engrossed in C.S. Lewis' *Prince Caspian*, and James chuckling to himself over *Soup*, were not to be disturbed by the BFG, for he too was reading. Robert was reading a book about Bo

Jackson. Two other "sport hero" books lay on his desk. Lucy began her hundred and fifty-third book of the year.

This period of silent, independent reading provided the first of Giacobbe's (1986) basics - time - and was a central activity of the Readers' Workshop that occurred daily. Other activities essential to Miss Atkins conceptualization of Reading Workshop were whole group discussions, which included mini-lessons; small group conferencing, which included discussions, goal setting and the choosing of books; and writing in response journals. Each of these will be described in this section of the chapter, from the perspective of Miss Atkins' classroom.

Miss Amanda Atkins, in her eleventh year of teaching, chose as her pseudonym, the name of the main character from one of her favourite books, *The Toothpaste Genie* by Frances Duncan, because Amanda finds a genie, and that's something every teacher could use (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991). In 1987, when switching grades from a grade six assignment to grade four, Miss Atkins was allocated monies for her language arts program. That summer, between grades, she read Judith Newman's *Whole language: Theory in use*, and Nancy Atwell's *In the Middle*, and decided to invest the monies in children's literature. By establishing a classroom collection of books, she chose to restructure her teaching to rely more on literature than on textbooks, and on her students' selection of those books in her language arts program. She was prepared, as Atwell (1987) had suggested, to try giving her students a sense of autonomy and ownership over their reading. Though a genie might have been useful during the change from textbooks

to trade books, Miss Atkins found the support she needed by working closely with a fellow teacher who was also making the change.

Over the next three years Miss Atkins used prize money from reading incentive programs, dollars budgeted for materials, and earnings from workshop presentations to purchase new books and build up her classroom collection. Because of her personal investment in the literature, she was able to bring much of the collection with her to a new school and teaching assignment in the fall of 1990. Some titles belonging to the previous school were left behind, however, and as some genres (i.e. science fiction) were not well represented, Miss Atkins was faced with the task of continuously building up the collection.

The collection in this particular classroom is housed in four bookshelves situated around the periphery of the room. One double shelved bookcase holds single copies of titles, while the other three accommodate one hundred and fifty sets of conference group books. Authors like Betsy Byars, Joan Clark, Roald Dahl, Gordon Korman, Jean Little, Katherine Paterson, and Kit Pearson, are well represented. Each set consists of four copies of the same title. When Boots first entered the classroom in September and saw all the books, he thought to himself, Oh no! We're going to have to read all these? His adverse attitude to reading didn't allow him to imagine "how much fun the reading would be" for him (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). Following the daily quiet reading time described above, Miss Atkins usually called the children together in the meeting area, which was situated in the only isolated corner of the classroom. Away from the noise that emanated from the adjoining classrooms, and patterning Atwell's (1987) mini-lessons

that lasted for five to ten minutes, Miss Atkins discussed with the children procedural information, literary elements, authors and genres, and practices of good readers. During discussions she modeled the strategies that good readers use, introduced new books being added to the classroom collection, recommended books to particular groups based on her knowledge of their interests and directions, shared her own reading experiences, modeled responses, reviewed expectations and procedures, celebrated accomplishments, discussed reading problems, and read to the children from a variety of genres and authors. During small group conference time, and/or on one-to-one with the children, Miss Atkins reminded the children and reinforced the lessons of the large group gatherings.

Subsequent to this whole-class time, the children conferenced about their reading in small groups of three to four students. Knowing that she wanted to foster the social nature of reading, and to extend oral language development, Miss Atkins grouped the children into reading conference groups. Together they chose books and met each day to question, respond and reflect upon their reading with one another.

At the beginning of the school year, Miss Atkins organized the children into conference groups based on individual reading habits (these were monitored during September), reading ability (assessed through Cloze activities, Informal Reading Inventories, Gates McGinite, and the Edmonton Spelling test), personality (as she got to know them), and established and developing friendships (based on input from the children themselves). Although there were no groups mixed by gender, three of the eight groups were a combination of grade five and six children. In January, when the groups were

reformed, the children indicated to Miss Atkins with whom they would like to read. One of the groups, a group of grade six girls that I eventually connected with, remained intact throughout the whole year, because they had no problems in the first term...they all liked the same type of books...and they were quite busy out of school on the same nights (Field Notes, 10 Jan. 1991).

Each day, for about fifteen to twenty minutes, the groups met, books in hand, and sat in a circle to *say something* (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988) about what they were reading. Drawing on her own personal reading experiences, and the kind of talk that she engaged in when conversing with friends and colleagues about a current bestseller, a book by a favourite author, or an experience with a new genre, Miss Atkins introduced the children to response by inviting them to say something in their groups about their experience with the book they were reading: what they liked and didn't like, what struck them, what they thought might happen, and what they didn't understand. She wanted the children to respond in terms of what the reading meant to them, and what did or did not connect with their own experiences.

On any given day during conference group time, one might have heard the children ask about words and/or parts they didn't understand: "What's bouillabaisse?"/ "How did she die?"; make personal statements: "I wouldn't like to live on the moon"/ "I wouldn't want Powderlegs doing surgery on me"; ask for opinions about characters, the book generally, ideas in the book, and the author: "Do you think stars die?"/ "Do you think he's a good writer?"; make and seek predictions; "I think his dad might be dead"/ "What do you think will happen to Gilly?"; relate the story to their own lives:

"Do you like looking at the stars?"/ "People used to think that about me. I know how she feels"; comment on the level of difficulty of a book: "This book was too easy!"/ "I'm just not understanding it"; share a favourite part: "I liked it when he chopped off his hand"/ "I thought it was neat that the injured would wait till 11:00 or 12:00 o'clock for her just to come and see them"; and share the things they noticed or found interesting: "Notice how Edward softens when his grandfather mentions that Robin knows how to operate his father's pump."/ "I didn't know worms made holes for air and water to get in the soil" (Field Notes, 10, Jan. to 23 May 1991).

As Miss Atkins weaved her way through the groups each day she checked that the children were sitting in a circle (this facilitated the talk), had their books with them (for quick reference and for setting goals), and listened to their talk. The children were secure in the knowledge that she was nearby should her presence become necessary (Field Notes, 26 Feb, 1991). When their talk centred around confusion or uncertainty, they frequently asked for her help. Otherwise, taking her cue from the conversation, she informally joined in, taking care not to dominate or lead the conversation too much (Field Notes, June, 1991). She commented on an event, a character, or an author to share the experience of a favourite book (she had read most of the collection), asked questions, and promoted books. From these daily encounters and exchanges Miss Atkins was able to keep mental track of what books were being read, individual and group responses, concerns and/or problems being encountered, and developing tastes in authors and genres.

In the first term, each of the eight groups tape recorded a conference group discussion (See Appendix B for an excerpt of one group's discussion). These tapes were listened to by the children themselves, other groups, and the teacher, with the view to learning about and improving participation in, and quality of discussions. In whole class sessions in the meeting area the children identified from the tapes the good things that were happening in the conference groups, and the problems they were having. Together they worked out possible solutions. On one occasion they decided that one way of dealing with a dominant member of a group was to take turns, moving clockwise around the circle until everyone had spoken. Open discussion could then follow. To involve quiet members, their suggestions included letting them talk when they wanted, asking them questions, or making them go first in the clockwise turn-taking (Field Notes, 12 Jan. 1991). By focusing on the pragmatics of discussion groups, ways to discuss were scaffolded (Langer, 1991).

By incorporating the underlying principles of Short & Kauffman's (1988) Literature Circles into conference groups, Miss Atkins addressed another of Giacobbe's (1986) basics - that of response. In addition to the opportunity afforded by conference groups to explore their interpretations and reach new understandings, each Wednesday the children wrote to Miss Atkins, or to each other in response journals (See Appendix C for a sample entry). Writing informally they shared their reactions to the books they were reading. The children consistently chose a favourite part to share, because it was humorous: "I thought it was hilarious when Henry could not move his feet at all" (Danny on *The Wish giver*, Response Journal, 5 Nov.1990); because "it seemed so real": "I

really like it when you're reading it, it feels like you are in the attic and are writing it too" (Cara on *The diary of Anne Frank*, Response Journal, 2 Nov.1990); because it gave them the shivers: "Sometimes I get so scared I have to stop and set it down" (Cara on *More tales for the midnight hour*, Response Journal, 15 Nov.1990); or because it was exciting: "like when the bear attacked" (Boots, Response Journal, 30 April, 1991).

By inviting the children to comment on what they were reading, to make predictions about what might happen next, and to share the experiences of their reading, in conference groups and in response journals, they learned to respond in terms of what their reading meant to them rather than in terms of what they thought Miss Atkins wanted (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988).

As the group discussions drew to a close each day, the children decided amongst themselves how much they would read prior to the next day's conference. The group of girls that I connected with had no problems, over the course of the year, deciding on the number of pages they would read before their next conference. They were in tune with each others' commitments outside of school, planned accordingly, and set realistic goals that everyone in the group was comfortable with.

A mixed grade five/six group of boys, on the other hand, occasionally needed help from Miss Atkins in determining a goal that they all could live with. Their group was of mixed ability with one lad who was overzealous and another who read slowly. As no one was to read beyond the goal (it made discussions difficult - I found this out for myself when I joined a group to read), the former boy was always through his reading quickly and wanting more, while the latter was struggling to keep up. It took

some time, and Miss Atkins' occasional involvement in the deliberations for the boys to get to know and appreciate each other enough to handle daily goal setting satisfactorily on their own. Eventually, the overzealous lad, Ian, made sure that he had two books on the go: his group book, and one of his own choosing. When he met the group goal for the day, he switched books. Many of the faster readers in the class also chose this same compromise.

The daily group goal was recorded on a master sheet held on a clipboard that lay on a table to one side of the classroom (See Appendix D for an example of the master recording sheet). The recording of daily goals made public the children's responsibility to their group, and to themselves as readers. They were expected to read and to make their conference group work. When disputes within groups arose over what they had agreed to read, this written record was referred to.

In addition to the daily group goal, the children set personal goals for their reading each month. For easy reference, the children kept a record of the books they read in the back of their response journals (See Appendix E for an example). In reference to his goal for the month of November, Philip, a grade five student, wrote in his learning log that his goal was to read five books. He read thirteen. He thought he read more because of the Community of Readers (Field Notes, 3 Dec. 1991). For the same month, Robin set his sights on completing twelve books. When he counted the titles listed in his response journal, however, he discovered that he had only read eight. Neither he or Miss Atkins was concerned about this shortfall, because he and his group had chosen longer, harder books (Field Notes, 3 Dec. 1991).

During the transition to the Writing Workshop (Atwell, 1987) that followed the Readers' Workshop each day, groups that had finished a book chose new ones. Mondays were busy, as many groups finished books over the weekend. Otherwise, there were usually two to three groups choosing new books. Sometimes, the members of a group unanimously knew what book they wanted to read next: a new book that had been added to the collection, a book that had been recommended by another group or by Miss Atkins and fit in with a developing interest in a particular genre, author, setting or theme, a sequel that was calling, or a book they had been waiting for that had just been returned to the shelf.

When decisions were not so obvious, each member of the group chose a book from the shelf and introduced it to the rest of the group. The children chose books that had to do with things they liked, or that featured characters that were like them (Field Notes, 3 Dec. 1990). They used information from the covers of the books, including the illustration, notations of awards, and the *blurbs* on the back. Often, if the blurbs sounded interesting, they were willing to give the book a try. Jill, a fifth grader, preferred to read the first page of the book because the blurb on the back is not written by the author (Field notes, 14 Jan. 1991). She wanted a taste of the writing as a basis for making her decisions.

During this choosing time, the children talked with one another and with Miss Atkins as she moved back and forth among the book shelves. They talked about authors: "Here's another book by Betsy Byars" or "Are there any more books by Gordon Korman?"; about setting: "We really liked *Lost in the Barrens*, so I'm looking for

another Arctic story"; about genre: "Your group hasn't read a fantasy yet. This might be a good one to start with"; about titles: "This one sounds interesting - *After the bomb!*" (Field Notes, 21 & 25 Feb. 1991).

Added to these considerations of author, setting, genre, and title, were recommendations. Questions such as - "Lisa's group thought this book was funny. Did your group like it?" - were common. (Field Notes, 21 Feb. 1991) Leslie selected *The daring game* for her group to consider because Kit Pearson had herself recommended the book when Leslie met her during a promotion at a local book store. Many recommendations, of course, came from Miss Atkins. She had the reputation of recommending "wicked books". Johnny's faith - "when she recommends a book, I usually try to get it, 'cause they're good" - was reinforced by Jamie - "She recommended *Curse of the Viking grave*, and it's my favourite book" (Field Notes, 21 Feb. 1991). Other readers' tips that a book was really good, made "the act of choosing a book more efficient and less risky" (Hepler & Hickman, 1982, p. 279).

Introducing their selection to the rest of their conference group, the children often added snippets of their book shelf conversations, and any recommendations, to their reading of the blurb on the back of the book. Observing this process, one might have seen a group of grade six girls choosing from among *The mad queen of Mordra*, *The Cartoonist*, *Easy Avenue* and *Underground to Canada*, while a mixed grade five/six group of boys considered *After the Bomb*, one of Colin McNaughton's poetry books, and *The hand of Robin Squires*. The variety of authors and genres that were brought to conference groups for consideration meant that none of the groups "got stuck" in a

particular genre. An examination of the children's Reading Records revealed that they had indeed read a wide range of material.

Once all the books had been introduced, the group made a decision, employing one of several strategies that Miss Atkins had suggested. The most popular method of deciding was that of *throwing fingers*. Once all the books had been introduced, the group voted for each title in turn, by throwing fingers on the count of three (no points - shown by a fist - to five points - a fully extended hand). The book with the highest number of points became the group's next read. In the event of a tie, the two books were held behind someone's back, and one of them chosen randomly.

The throwing fingers method worked for most groups. A couple of groups of girls felt, however, that friends voted together, rather than considering a book on the basis of the information provided, or their own personal feelings. Under such conditions, a few girls felt that "good" books that they brought to the group for consideration were often rejected and that, indeed, their choices never had a chance of being selected. Miss Atkins suggested that the girls in these two groups take turns selecting, on behalf of the group, from the books presented. This seemed to work for both groups, although one group eventually returned to the finger throwing method, confident, as they began to gel as a group, that acceptable criteria for selection were being invoked.

Many children read books, chosen in conference groups, that they otherwise would not have read. For example, when Leslie presented Kit Pearson's *The daring game* to Rachel and Sara for their consideration, Rachel only threw one finger for it, as

her vote. She registered her enthusiasm for the book Sara presented - Brenda Bellingham's *Curse of the silver box* - by throwing five fingers. Bellingham's book, however, only garnered nine fingers, to Pearson's eleven. Although it was not a book Rachel wanted to read, she read it, and later in the year rated it as one of the best books she had read.

The books not picked after the selection process were returned to the shelf and each group member signed out a copy of the selected book from the set of four. Each book held a card in a back pocket. The card was dated, signed and placed in a plastic basket on the teacher's desk. Upon completing the book, the children placed the card back in the pocket and the book in a box of "books to be shelved". Miss Atkins reshelfed the books by author.

The choosing of books, the daily setting of goals, and the giving, receiving and hearing of responses that were based on what the reading meant to the children, were the activities carried on within conference groups that acknowledged Giacobbe's (1986) third basic - ownership. Together with the time given for independent reading and sharing, and the opportunity to respond supported by discussions within conference groups, and dialogue in response journals, Miss Atkins fit together Giacobbe's (1986) basics, basics that "all readers - all learners - need" (Atwell, 1987, p. 156). In this way, Miss Atkins presented a reading program organized as a Readers' Workshop, centred around small conference groups, and built upon the reading of children's literature.

Miss Atkins, a professional who led a full, literate life, fostered a Community of Readers, similar to Atwell's (1987), and the ones described by Hepler and Hickman

(1982). As the children learned to choose books and talk with one another about their books and reading in groups and through journals, they came to know Miss Atkins as a "big time" reader - a member of their Community who enjoyed reading so much that she wanted them to experience the same joy. She was, from their perspective, crazy about reading. You can see that, they offered, why else would she have all these books...tell us about the books she's reading...read to us...read when we're reading...say this is a good book...and encourage us to read? (Field Notes, Feb. 1991).

Seven Young Readers

The key informants for the study were three boys: Boots, Robin and Tom, who formed one conference group, and four girls: Gilly, Selina, Eliza and Mandy, who formed the second.

Boots, a grade five boy, was described by his friends as always doing something (Field Notes, 20 June, 1991). He played second base and short stop for his baseball team, sang with a Youth Choir, played the violin and the piano, kept up his school work, collected Marvel cards and hats (his favourite was a Brooks Hydroflo that his cousin gave him), and read.

He wasn't "into reading" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991) in grade four. As a matter of fact, it was Boots' reaction, upon entering the classroom in September, of "Oh no! We're going to have to read all these [books]" that was quoted earlier. During the course of his grade five year he read forty-one books, enjoying the most those with lots of action or humour because "that's what keeps you on your toes" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). Among his favourite were Joan Clark's *The hand of Robin*

Squires, from which he could not be torn (Field Notes, 5 March, 1991), and Gordon Korman's *The Zucchini Warriors*, from which he chose his pseudonym Boots, because he's the leader (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991).

In describing his best reads he told of going along with the character. For instance, when he was reading *The hand of Robin Squires*, he "put himself in Robin's shoes", and when Robin's hand was chopped off to free him from a manacle that chained him to a pit wall, Boots "pulled his arm back...and imagined how much pain he would have been in and what it would be like not to have a hand" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991).

Robin, also a grade five student, was an outstanding athlete. He played tennis every day of the week and was ranked third for his age in the province. He was well liked in the class: the kind of guy you always want on your team (Field Notes, 20 June, 1991). Fun to be with, Robin invariably had a smile on his face.

When asked whether he had been a reader in grade four he replied: "Sort of. I read my own books (a lot of comics), not ones from the library" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). During his grade five year he "tried books with tough reading in them" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991), and discovered that he liked reading even more (Artifact, 6 June, 1991).

He described the experience of reading as "sort of like someone telling a story that you've never heard before and you ride along...like you're in the book...following the characters through...till it ends" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). Robin also read

more than forty books and, not surprisingly, named the one from which he chose his pseudonym, *The hand of Robin Squires*, as his favourite.

Tom, a grade six student, joined the class in January. Quiet, but not shy, he found the move from a neighbouring province tough because he had lots of friends (Field Notes, 20 June, 1991). At recess he was always to be found riding the tire on the creative playground. He liked the outdoors, and enjoyed playing soccer and football.

When he joined Miss Atkins class, Tom was expected to embrace reading and to fit into a conference group. As he had only read one book the previous year, he wasn't too sure what to expect. Initially, he didn't read. When he met each day with Robin and Boots to discuss their book he "faked it" because he didn't want to "let his group down" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). It was a desire to be part of the talking, however, that eventually motivated Tom to start reading. As he revealed, "I felt left out" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). Although Robin and Boots were always on his case to get his reading done (Field Notes, 20 June, 1991), he felt comfortable enough to tell them when the daily goal was too large (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). They also "helped him choose books, explained...and talked about parts so that [he] could understand, and taught [him] to picture...and think about [a book] in [his] head" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991).

At the end of the school year Tom was not yet confident (Field Notes, 20 June, 1991) in choosing books on his own, but he wrote, nevertheless, that he was "an awesome, cool, rad, wicked, super-sonic, fast, easy, speedy, radical, understanding a lot of books, Canadian, loyal, great Reader. Well, I've improved" (Artifact, 6 June, 1991).

Gilly, a popular girl with her teacher and classmates, was portrayed by her friends as determined and confident. Even though they considered that things came easily to her, they also believed that if she wanted to do something, she'd do it (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991). She was an excellent student, and was heavily involved in sports, playing ringette in the winter, and softball in the summer.

Gilly (a pseudonym chosen from Katherine Paterson's *The great Gilly Hopkins*) had always been a reader. For her, reading was a way for her imagination to get a workout (Field Notes, 25 April, 1991). From this perspective there was "no such thing as a hard book", for her limit was "however far [her] imagination could stretch" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991). As she shared, once you're into the reading habit you can read anything (Field Notes, 23 May, 1991)... "You just have to try and get into the book...try to imagine yourself in it" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991).

Gilly's favourite book was *Spellhorn* by Berlie Doherty. She described it as really fantasy, very complicated. Even though there were times she didn't know what was happening, the fantasy and complications simply served to keep her alert (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991). Books like *Spellhorn* took her past the realities of the world we live in...pushing the limits of her imagination. This was a valuable experience for Gilly because she believed that "people find you more interesting if you can think of different things" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991).

Joining Gilly in a conference group was her good friend Eliza. Gilly affirmed that Eliza had a soft heart, because she was kind to everyone and sensitive to their feelings (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991). Eliza liked being with people, and her friends in

turn found her fun to be with as she had a good sense of humour (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991). She liked sports - she played softball - and during her grade six year she earned her All Round Cord as a Girl Guide.

Eliza came into grade six a reader, although she speculated that her grade five teacher hadn't been into reading the way Miss Atkins was. She reported that he didn't encourage them to read. During USSR [an acronym for uninterrupted, silent, sustained, reading] he'd just sit at his desk and mark. "He didn't care if [they] were reading or not" (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991). Encouraged by Miss Atkins, she found herself in grade six "reading more books, reading faster, and reading more variety" (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991).

Her favourite stories, however, "were about people and their problems" (Response Journal, 9 April, 1991). She usually had two books on the go at a time: her group book, and another from one of the sets of books that her mum had purchased for her. She had read so many *Sweet Valley Twins*, that she had a picture in her mind of their house and their school. The school, she related, was like her school in her mind, but it was a Junior High...and the outside of their house was the same as hers, but the inside was totally different (Field Notes, 25 April, 1991). When she read "more challenging books" with her group, "like *The daring game* by Kit Pearson", she had "to work harder at seeing pictures, because of the unfamiliar settings" (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991). Her pseudonym represented her attachment to two characters, with variations of the same name, from *The Daring Game* and *The Sweet Valley Twins Series*.

The third member of this conference group was Mandy. As a happy person, outgoing and lively, she was fun to be with. She was athletic, enjoying most sports, but particularly those like skiing, that allowed her to be outdoors. "Very close to her family", she liked "being out in the woods...hunting and fishing with [her] stepfather". (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991)

Before joining this particular class for grade six, Mandy "didn't read that much" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991). Throughout the year, however, "her attitude...totally changed" (Artifact, 6 June, 1991), as she got caught up in: "trying to figure out who the mystery person or thing was, feeling sorry for the characters (I'd hate to be sent away from my parents), fantasy - neat oh!, thinking ahead about what might happen, and thinking about books after [she'd] finished reading them" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991). Her pseudonym came from the Mandy Adventure books.

The final member of this foursome of grade six girls was Selina. She was considered a good friend because she cares, likes to be with you, and listens to you (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991). Somewhat giddy, she could always be depended on to make you laugh...when you're down. (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991) She was athletic, and her latest claim to fame had been that at Outdoor School...she beat all the boys arm wrestling. (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991)

Selina entered grade six "loving reading". As she was introduced to books by Joan Clark, Kit Pearson, and Katherine Paterson, however, she came to enjoy reading more (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991). A predominantly aesthetic stance allowed her to feel that when someone was about to make a mistake in a book she was reading, she

could try and stop them. For instance, while experiencing "Helen being dared to go out after hours" in *The daring game*, Selina "wanted to stop her from going" (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991). She especially enjoyed "olden days stories". While reading them she adopted a predominantly aesthetic stance but was aware, nevertheless, that she was acquiring "information about life in that time" (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991). Selina chose her pseudonym from Joan Clark's *The moons of Madeleine*.

The remaining twenty-one members of this particular class, whose thoughts, feelings, and reactions are very much a part of this study, also chose as pseudonyms, the names of characters from favourite books, and/or characters with whom they connected. For instance, one grade five boy chose the pseudonym Philip, from the book *After the bomb*, because he's brave, smart, and he survived the bomb and helped the others (Field Notes, 4 June, 1991).

Summary

In this section of the chapter I have described Miss Atkins' version of Readers' Workshop, highlighting the various components that helped her to address Giacobbe's (1986) basics of time, ownership and response, and to establish a Community of Readers, within which the children learned to work together to choose books, read and respond. As well, the seven children from two separate conference groups, who were the key informants for the study, were introduced.

Engagements with Text and The Construction of Meaning

This section of the chapter explores the nature of the children's engagements with text and their construction of meaning. Langer's (1990, 1991) stances, reviewed below, have been used to frame the children's responses, responses which were revealed in response journals, in informal talk with other members of the Community, and formally through interviews.

Langer's (1990, 1991) orientations to meaning, or different literary stances toward texts were developed from an analysis of middle and high school students think-aloud protocols during reading. They are:

- * *Being Out and Stepping Into an Envisionment*, where readers make the connections necessary to begin to construct an envisionment.
- * *Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment*, where they use their envisionments to inform their growing understanding.
- * *Stepping Back and Rethinking What One Knows*, where they use their envisionments to reflect on personal experience, ideas or knowledge.
- * *Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience*, where they look critically at their envisionments, their reading experiences, and the text itself.

(p. 252)

Langer (1990) defines the reader's envisionment as "the understanding a reader has about a text at a particular point in time: what the reader understands, the questions that develop, and the hunches that arise about how the piece might unfold" (p. 5).

Framed according to their envisionments, the children's meaning making settled into three levels of response: 1) constructing envisionments that were essential to their

reading enjoyment 2) moving through envisionments which captured the nature of their experiences and their growing understandings and 3) extending experiences by rethinking and objectifying the ones that captured their novice attempts at critical response.

Although each level of response will be discussed separately, it must be noted that as children begin to rethink and objectify their experiences, the understanding gleaned from such exploration feeds back, to enhance the building of future envisionments and the lived-through experiences therein (Rosenblatt, 1968,1978).

Constructing Envisionments

The children's responses at this level reflect the time, effort and importance they attached to constructing envisionments. As they read, and met each day to discuss their books, the children formed tentative questions and associations of character and place and gathered information that enabled them to build images in their minds of the possible world of the texts they chose to read. This work of the imagination enabled the children to begin constructing an envisionment, an envisionment which they were able to "step into" (Langer, 1990).

Similarities marked the children's accounts of this process. As Robin explained, the experience of "entering a place ...you've never been before", meant "exploring it and getting a picture of it in your mind" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). When successful at filling in the gaps left in the text (Iser, 1978), and creating a picture in their mind's eye, it was like standing there in their own spot...seeing the characters, and the stuff around (Danny, Field Notes, 22 May, 1991).

Placing themselves amongst the main characters was "a cool feeling", Boots claimed (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991) because, as Selina revealed "they can't see me, but I can see them" (Response Journal, 8 April, 1991). By "closing everything else off", and "imagining [themselves] right there as onlooker[s]" (Gilly, Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991), the children often found themselves in the main character's shoes, caught up in the drama of the text, but distanced enough to see themselves as spectators (Britton, 1970).

Eliza explained how she saw things from Rowena's perspective in *The wish giver*:

I couldn't see the girl, but I could see the guy growing into the tree, and when she turned, my view turned around, and when she saw her dad, I saw her dad. (Interview Protocol, 8 May, 1991).

Eliza stood in the poplar grove with Rowena, and saw through her eyes, Henry Piper "putting down roots". She heard Rowena's father call, and as Rowena swung around to answer, Eliza's gaze followed. Eliza had a sense of place and character, and the "reality" of the situation she found herself in allowed her to be carried along by the story and to experience from the inside the world created by the author.

For many of the children this stepping into the text occurred "right off the bat" (Robin, Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991) and was important to their meaning making. As Boots explained, "If I'm experiencing it myself, it's a good book". "If I'm not...witnessing it", he went on to add, "I just want to finish, and I'm not reading with meaning" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). The children recognized the writing, the setting and the genre as potentially problematic to the construction of envisionments.

Good writing, asserts Macrorie (1976) puts the reader there. When experiencing *Who is Frances Rain*, Gilly was put there by "the way" [Margaret Buffie] expresse[d] the characters' feelings" (Response Journal, 21 Jan.1991). From another point of view, Boots explained that Joan Clark put him on Oak Island with Robin because she grabbed him, and he wanted to hang on (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). Boots, and his group found that the process of stepping into worlds created by **other** authors, who had different ways of story-telling and were not as descriptive as Clark, took longer, because they had to create all the pictures for themselves (Robin, Boots & Tom Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). In this regard, Danny speculated that "it would be neat to see the movie of [*Prince Caspian*] because you would see the island better (Response Journal, April, 1991). His comment illustrates how important it was for the children to create for themselves a picture of the setting.

Description and illustrations helped the children when they didn't know the setting (Gilly, Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). When reading *The Hand of Robin Squires*, Gilly found it hard at the beginning, because she had never been to England, and didn't know anything about it (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). With little to bring from her own background knowledge, she had to depend on Clark's descriptions to get a sense of the world she was stepping into. Alternatively, she found it easy to begin constructing envisionments of Eric Wilson's books because "he writes about real places in Canada and [she] usually kn[e]w what and where he [wa]s talking about". (Response Journal, 15 Nov. 1990). With Wilson, creating a picture was more of a collaborative effort.

Similar problems of envisionment building (Langer, 1990, 1991) arose when dealing with a new genre. Robin and Boots felt that when you haven't read any books from a particular genre before... you don't know how they are...or what to expect, you don't understand (Field Notes, 22 May 1991). In such cases, when Robin "didn't really know what was happening" (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991), he went to the members of his conference group for help. Together, they would "go back to the part in the book and read it over some and they would tell him so he could understand it a little easier" (Robin, Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). Often this was enough for him to gain enough background information to help begin constructing an envisionment (Langer, 1991).

When the children were unable to begin building an envisionment and to establish a context for understanding (Langer, 1990), they went to their conference groups, declared their lack of understanding, and asked questions about the setting, the characters, or perhaps even a word. The information they were able to gather from fellow readers usually enabled them to "make contact with the world of the text" (Langer, 1990). Once connected, they were able to "step into" the world of the text and be carried along (Langer, 1990, 1991). An experience of Leslie's group is representative of this process.

While reading Gloria Miklowitz's *After the bomb* Leslie and her group came to the part in the story where people were being taken to the hospital to be checked for radiation (Field Notes, 4 June, 1991). As a group they knew that people were dying after the bomb - from the radiation (Field Notes, 4 June, 1991), but they didn't know

what radiation was. They didn't understand what it did to you, or how it could hurt you and they wondered if it could be a disease, a rash, or a burn (Field Notes, 4 June, 1991). They were unable to relate the text to what they already knew.

As the girls became aware that as a group they did not have the background knowledge necessary to clarify their collective uncertainties, Miss Atkins was called upon. The background information that she was able to provide about the immense quantity of energy released by an atomic bomb helped the girls understand the effects of overexposure to radiation, and why the hospital staff in the story had to check people for it (Field Notes, 4 June, 1991). This new knowledge resolved the girls' own uncertainties about radiation and connected them to the world of the text, giving them a way to continue to construct their envisionment. Their fresh understanding of the situation that Phil and the other characters found themselves in "after the bomb" enabled the girls to enter, or step into the envisionment they built with Miss Atkins' help and to move on with the story (Langer, 1990).

These collaborative attempts to construct envisionments were not always successful. Robin explained how Miss Atkins attempted to help them when they were reading *Robot alert*:

At the beginning it was really mixed up and nobody knew what it was talking about. There were so many characters with weird names and it was tough to understand. We asked Miss Atkins to help us. We took it part by part...writing down all the names...and who they were, beside. (Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991).

Eventually, the boys figured out who was who. So much of their attention was focused on shaping the characters, however, that the potential lived-through sights, sounds and

feelings, that for these boys came from "being right there, witnessing things", were lost and with them meaning (Boots, Interview Protocol, 6 May, 1991). They abandoned the book. As Langer (1990, 1991) might explain, the boys did not have enough prior knowledge and experience with works of Science Fiction to "make contact with the world of the text" (p. 238). As a result they were unable to begin to construct an envisionment, and to get "caught up in the narrative of [the] story" (p. 238).

Bo, another grade five boy, was also not able to get caught up in the narrative of a story his group was reading, for the contact he made with the world of the text was not plausible. The boys were reading *Antar and the Eagles*, a book Bo considered not to be very good because it had "way too much exaggeration" (Response Journal, 27 Nov. 1990). He could not accept as plausible, the possible world (Bruner, 1986) created by the author of this book, William Mayne. Bo was not able to give his imagination the workout it needed (Gilly, Field notes, 25 April, 1991) in order for him to accept and commit himself to the proposition that an eagle could swoop down and pick up a boy, and that the boy could learn to fly. Bo entered the possible world of the text with his actual world logic in tow, and perceived the action of the eagles, and the boy as an exaggeration. He could not accept, as one of his friends did, the author "mak[ing] stuff that is impossible, work" (Ian, Response Journal, 25 March). It didn't work for Bo. He could not step into this possible world, and be carried along by the story (Langer, 1990).

By allowing the boys to abandon these books Miss Atkins acknowledged, and the boys had reinforced, the importance of meaning and authenticity to literacy activities. Although both of these books were considered good by many readers in the Community,

at that point in time the text was not sufficiently clear in the former case, and the world it presented not acceptable, in the case of the latter, for the boys to continue the reading.

By way of contrast to the need for children to abandon texts, the enjoyment that came from the successful construction of envisionments was reflected in the book recommendations the children made to one another. Their accounts of good books often began with "have you read _____; if you haven't you're missing a good book" (Jim, Response Journal, 2 Nov. 1990). They recommended books that "make you want to know what's going to happen next" (Jamie on *My side of the mountain*, Response Journal, 27 Nov. 1990), books that the children "always wanted to turn the page [on], for [they] knew something [was] going to happen" (Gilly, Response Journal, 26 Nov. 1990) - books like *Lost in Barrens*, that they "just couldn't put down" (Jamie, Response Journal, 13 Dec. 1990).

Other books, such as *The hand of Robin Squires*, *The mummy, the will, and the crypt*, and *The great Gilly Hopkins*, were looked on favourably, and considered inviting, suitable, or must-reads because of comments like: I loved this book, I just couldn't stop reading; or, I was so scared, my stomach flipped right over; and, My life is pretty good, compared to hers (Field Notes, 27 May, 1991).

In addition to the foregoing recommendations, informal talk between friends revealed the children's enjoyment of the books they were reading. For example, on his way to meet with his conference group about the book *After the bomb*, Boots stopped at Tom's desk, placed his hand on Tom's copy of the book, and said: This book is so cool! I loved it (Field Notes, 26 March, 1991).

Another conversation that I overheard occurred as Robin was reading a reply, in his response journal, written by his desk mate Jamie:

Robin: I like your comment about the shoes.

Jamie: What shoes?

Robin: Remember the moccasins in *Curse of the Viking Grave*?

Jamie: That's an awesome story.

Robin (after a moment's hesitation): Which do you like better. *Curse of the Viking grave* or *Lost in the Barrens*?

Jamie: *Lost in the Barrens*, but they're both good.

(Robin & Jamie, Field Notes, 18 March, 1991).

In the flood of his recollection of Farley Mowat's Arctic adventure, Robin's attempt to focus Jamie's attention on the moccasins was washed away. Robin, carried along by Jamie's reconsideration of the story, inquired after Jamie's preference for the two Mowat books that they had both read. Robin accepted Jamie's favourite without comment and the boys carried on with their reading.

Robin and Jamie's chat about Farley Mowat's books, and Boots' comment to Tom about *After the bomb* are illustrative of the informal exchanges that were part of the social fabric of the classroom. While the superficial talk between Robin and Jamie may have interfered with their pursuit of the significance of the moccasins, the pursuit of which might have led to a more interpretive point, their conversation reveals, nonetheless, that the children felt free to express themselves, albeit on a simple level, about the books they were reading.

Within this context, those children who were readers read and enjoyed their reading more, while those who didn't read were persuaded to begin. Leslie, a grade five student, explained how she reached this first level of response as a member of the classroom Community: Because of the group goals, you have to read. Then it becomes

a habit, and you just do it because you want to. Now I read every day (Field Notes, 26 Feb. 1991). In addressing her new status as a reader, Leslie spoke for a number of children in the classroom who never, never used to read, except for a book report or when their mothers made them (Field Notes, 14 Jan. 1991).

For these children who began the school year indifferent to books and reading (the odd child even hated reading completely), the daily reading imposed on them by the period of sustained silent reading, was a challenge. They read every school day in class because of Miss Atkins' expectations. Danny, a grade six boy, explained that expectation this way: Miss Atkins makes us read - well, she doesn't make us - she wants us to read (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). A comment by Myra, a grade six girl, illuminated further Miss Atkins' influence: I didn't like reading until I met Miss Atkins (Field Notes, 17 Jan. 1991). By year end, Myra wrote:

I can read faster now that I read more books. I understand books more and I can enjoy them. I have a different attitude towards books! I enjoy reading. (Artifact, 6 June, 1991).

Often, at the beginning of the school year children like Myra were unable during the time allotted in class, to read as far as they needed to, to reach the goal set by their conference group. They felt compelled, by their teacher's expectations and by a commitment to their group, to take their books home to keep reading. Reading at home was supported by parents, as Danny's testimony illustrates.

Danny's father made him carry on with his reading, for a half hour each evening (he was "grounded from television"). As Danny revealed, it was the only way to meet your goals (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). He had started the year reading magazines and

comic books, but as his grade six year came to a close, Danny was reading at home, whenever he could and choosing C.S. Lewis, not because he had to, but because he liked going to Narnia (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). Danny had joined the ranks of the habitual readers already in his classroom.

For those committed readers who read for themselves outside of school, the opportunity to read each day in class, supported by the Community, reinforced and honoured their involvement with reading. As Cara explained, "I came with a good attitude to reading but now I like it even more" (Artifact, 6 June, 1991). Moreover, Miss Atkins' love of books and reading taught these readers that **their** involvement with books was something to be shared and valued. Eliza's comment, in the last section of this chapter, about her grade five teacher's investment of time but not interest in her daily reading, illustrates this point. Miss Atkins' interest and encouragement legitimized Eliza's reading, for she knew that reading was valued by her teacher. At the end of the school year Eliza wrote, "I think that I am reading faster, more of a variety of genres, and reading more a night. I think I have become more literate" (Artifact, 6 June, 1991).

Readers such as Eliza, who began the school year as committed readers, also reported that their enjoyment of reading increased as they began to read more widely. Lee Galda (1988) advises that:

while it is vitally important to allow children to read what they find interesting and rewarding, thus encouraging voracious reading, it is also important to encourage wide reading, to introduce children to literature that they would not normally select themselves (p. 97).

Gilly, a voracious reader, reported that she "enjoyed her reading more as she got to know more books and authors" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991). Gilly "didn't know how many good books there were and how many different kinds of books she had to choose from" (Interview Protocol, 9 May, 1991). Her favourite genre was fantasy, but within this Community Gilly began reading and enjoying a wider range and variety of genres and authors.

The children in this classroom viewed reading as enjoyable - something "exciting", that you do everyday "for the fun of it", "to learn about things" and "to get more enjoyment out of life" (Reading Surveys, 6 June, 1991). Throughout the year they read many books, "enjoyed them, shared their enjoyment with others and looked for more of the same" (Sanders, 1987, p. 621). This enjoyment was very much a part of the success that Miss Atkins wanted for her students as readers. She wanted them to feel good about themselves as readers, and to be able to pick up a novel...enjoy it...and talk about it (Field Notes, 21 Feb., 26 March, 1991).

Moving Through Envisionments

The responses of the children at this level indicate that they had successfully made contact with the world of the text, were moving through their envisionments and developing their interpretations (Langer, 1990). Their responses were enhanced by the sights, sounds, feelings, and perceptions of their experiences, experiences they had while in the attic writing along in Anne Frank's diary, in the shaft with Robin as Actaudin tried to free him from the manacle, or in Narnia.

The children's responses reveal the nature of their lived-through experiences:

Experiencing the Sights (Rosenblatt, 1978). The children recalled specific incidents that captured their attention and interest, incidents such as the following that they saw clearly: "A whole bunch of boys jumping on the quarterback...the ref coming and taking them off...and seeing her face" (Bo on discovering that the quarterback was a girl in *The Zucchini Warriors*, Response Journal, 30 Oct. 1990); "a box of fizz [emptied by Bruno and Boots]...bubbling up like crazy...in the swimming pool" (Bo on *This can't be happening at Macdonald Hall*, Response Journal, 5 Nov. 1990); "This old lady...strolling her baby down the street and all one hundred and twenty-seven pheasants come flying out of the caravan" (Danny on *Danny the champion of the world*, Response Journal, 15 Oct. 1990).

Experiencing the Sounds (Rosenblatt, 1978). The following shared recollections point to the sounds that the children attended to during their reading. Sounds such as: "the 'strip' instead of the anthem" that "Bruno and Boots played [over the p.a. system] at the hockey game" (Bo on *This can't be happening at Macdonald Hall*, Response Journal, 5 Nov. 1990); the police car siren that Phil and the main character both heard. "He got so scared [he] jumped off the roof and broke both his legs" (Phil on *The not just anybody family*, Response Journal, Nov. 1990); Meko's skull splitting open, "as Billy Boles brought his pistol down hard on the little dog's head" (Leslie on *The hand of Robin Squires*, Response Journal, 9 April, 1991); or Billy Boles, "crashing through the trees behind them" as they ran through the woods with Robin and Actaudin (Tom, Field Notes, 20 May, 1991).

Experiencing the Feelings (Rosenblatt, 1978). As well, feelings that the children shared helped them to savor the experienced work: "Imagine being shipped off to some foreign country to live with a family that hates and disapproves of you" (Gilly on *The sky is falling*, Response Journal, 4 Dec.1990); "Edward made people feel they weren't equal and important" (Tom on *The hand of Robin Squires*, Field Notes, 20 June, 1991); "When Johnny looked down and saw that the flame [of the candle] had turned blue, I was so scared my stomach flipped right over" (Jamie on *The mummy, the will and the crypt*, Field Notes, 22 May,1991); "I could feel my skin being torn and shredded when Actaudin was being whipped" (Selina, Field Notes, 27 May,1991); "When Robin was freeing the slaves, I didn't feel Billy Boles coming up from behind, but I felt the blackness and the bump on my head" (Gilly on *The hand of Robin Squires*, Field Notes, 27 May, 1991).

Perceptions of the Experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978). Finally to show what they became aware of as a result of their lived-through experiences, the children shared their perceptions: "I think her trouble making was a way to say she didn't like what was happening to her" (Eliza on *The great Gilly Hopkins*, Field Notes, 27 May, 1991); "Mrs. Frisby is a good mother and does whatever she can for her children (Danny on *Mrs. Frisby and the rats of NIMH*, Response Journal, 19 March, 1991); "He shouldn't have gone in the blizzard. That's why he died" (Selina on *The hand of Robin Squires*, Field Notes, 22 May, 1991); "James doesn't like living with his aunts because they boss him around so much" (Danny on *James and the giant peach*, Response Journal

28 Oct. 1990); and "I think Helen is a sad girl, that's why she is playing tricks" (Katie S. on *The daring game*, Response Journal, 30 April, 1991).

While some response journals were full of recollections of lived through experiences (Rosenblatt, 1982), indications of vital personal experiences (Rosenblatt, 1968) were noticeably absent from one or two journals. The BFG's journal is an example. Although he "never used to read hardly ever" (Artifact, 10 June, 1991), he liked reading: "it can be exciting" (Reading Survey, Sept. 1990). In September, he recorded on a Reading Survey that he liked to read Garfield books. By the end of the school year he had "changed in the kind of books [he] read" (Artifact, 10 June, 1991) and added mysteries and adventures to the list. When asked in June how he felt about reading, he responded by stating that he had "become a better reader", and that he had "a better attitude towards reading" (Reading Survey & Artifact, 10 June, 1991).

From my discussions with the BFG and from reading his response journal, there were no indications, however, that paying attention to his own inner experience was part of his self-reported growth as a reader. His response entries were limited to statements such as "I thought the book was good" and "I like it so far." It is interesting that other children who began the school year as non-readers learned to articulate their engagement or involvement with the books they read, and the BFG did not.

There are at least two possible explanations for this. First of all, the BFG had not learned of the potential that "being right there" held. It was not a strategy shared in a mini-lesson, nor modelled by Miss Atkins. Furthermore, if one of the other members of his conference group used his imagination to place himself amongst the characters, this

was not shared, for the boys seldom talked about the book they were reading during conference time, preferring, instead, to discuss other things like their new running shoes (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991). A second explanation might be that the BFG, though he held some thoughts about what made reading "exciting", was simply not able to express them and to lend meaning and significance to the books he read.

Developing an Interpretation (Langer, 1990). It was responses similar to the ones quoted under the headings of sights, sounds, feelings and perceptions above, responses that captured "what seemed most important", "what shocked", and "what [the children] liked" (Rosenblatt, 1981, p.8), that often sparked discussion in conference groups. The children viewed the collaborative talk of conference groups as occasions to discuss how they felt about a book instead of just keeping it in their heads (Field Notes, 16 Jan. 1991). Their self-directed talk was important to them because when they sat and just talked about a book it not only helped them understand what happened, but they were also able to see different people's points of view, and to get to know what other people liked in a book (Field Notes, 14 and 17 Jan. 1991).

These discussions helped the children develop and deepen their understanding of the characters, the situations the characters found themselves in, their motives and emotions (Langer, 1990). On such occasions, the children frequently put themselves in the character's place and reflected on the choice or choices that the character made. The following discussion, held by Gilly, Mandy, Selina and Eliza while reading *The great Gilly Hopkins* is illustrative:

Eliza: Her trouble making was her way of saying she didn't like what was happening.

Mandy: I think she should have told her true feelings...about how she felt.

Eliza: Yeah, problems can be solved if we talk about them.

Gilly: Yeah, but maybe she didn't really understand what was happening. She's always saying her mother will come.

Mandy: And she thinks her mother is beautiful.

faced, and how she dealt with them. Eliza's statement, "problems can be solved..." and Selina's comment on "being open about your feelings...", are indicators of how these girls had translated their lived-through experiences with Gilly into generalizations and abstractions. The story had become more than Gilly's struggle, for it had for them more general application. In this way the girls' interpretation of the text was extended and changed (Langer, 1990).

Gilly: That's the way she wants her to be. She's just blocking things out cause it's hard to cope with.

Selina: You have to be open about your feelings...you have to deal with them.

Transcript 11 April, 1991.

As the girls began to discuss why Gilly was "a real pain" and so "cheeky", Mandy used her own perceptions of problem solving to reflect on how Gilly handled her situation, implying that she might have been farther ahead to talk out, rather than act out, what was bothering her. Eliza supported Mandy's implications, knowing also from her own personal experience that "problems can be solved if we talk about them". Gilly, the student, however, suggested that awareness precedes talk, and then went on to conjecture that Gilly's hope was what stood in her way. Mandy supported this, realizing that some of Gilly's hopes were stored in the beautiful picture that she held of her mother. Gilly, the student, then hinted that Gilly (Paterson's main character) was caught between two worlds: a hopeful one in which she saw her mother as beautiful, and the real one in which life was so difficult that the only way to cope was to block feelings out. At this

point Selina speculated that Gilly needed to stop hiding in the former world and deal with her feelings.

By starting from their understanding of Gilly as "a little brat", and bringing their own knowledge about problem solving, and information from the text to bear on Gilly's situation, the girls furthered their understanding of the problems this eleven year old girl

Extending Experiences

The children's understandings at this next level of response reflect their attempts to "find ways to rethink their responses and go beyond" (Langer, 1991, p. 34). Response on this plane was limited.

Reflecting on Personal Knowledge (Langer, 1990). One way in which some of the children extended their envisionments was to reflect on ideas, beliefs or feelings that they held, individually before reading the text. In the following conversation, which occurred after the girls had completed reading *The great Gilly Hopkins*, Mandy, Eliza, Gilly, and Selina collectively reflected on their own lives as compared to others':

Selina: It makes you see other people's problems and how well off you are compared to...

Eliza: Yeah. It was hard for Gilly to cope with...she had no choice of what family to live with. She really didn't belong. Life's not so easy for other people.

Mandy: Life isn't always the way you want it to be. I have a really good life. I have problems, but...

Selina: My life is pretty good.

Gilly: Me too. You have to overlook your problems when you read books like this, and see what's good.

Transcript, 27 May, 1991

Through Gilly, the girls had gained insights into the experience of "not really belonging". Using their understanding of Gilly's world, a world that the girls believed was so "difficult to cope with" that Gilly herself "blocked it all out", they were able to step back, and from that perspective to rethink (Langer, 1990) how they felt about their own world, in terms of how good their lives were. The reflective talk that resulted from this stance to the text - stepping back and rethinking what one knows (Langer, 1990), helped the girls to see, and perhaps appreciate, their own lives more clearly.

Taking a Critical Stance (Langer, 1990). There were also times during their discussions when the children extended their envisionments by taking a critical stance - "distancing themselves from the text to examine, evaluate, or analyze the reading experience or aspects of the text" (Langer, 1990, p. 247). For instance, during the reading of *The hand of Robin Squires*, Boots commented on how the end of every chapter in this book makes you want to keep reading (Field Notes, 7 March, 1991). He then turned to the end of Chapter Six in his book and read aloud:

How relieved I was that my uncle had locked my door. At least I was out of harm's way. I went back to sleep, completely unaware that what the locked door really meant was that I was a prisoner. (p.34)

Before he had barely finished, Robin piped in with "Chapter three's like that too" (Field Notes, 7 March, 1991). The boys flipped to the final words on page sixteen and Robin read:

What was it that induced him to abandon his experiments, especially his new pump, and go to America?

As Robin finished reading, Tom asked if they were all like that (Field Notes, 7 March, 1991). Boots assured him that they were, "but especially Chapter Six" and all three boys went scavenging through their books to confirm. They read on their own, verifying Boots' assertion and pointing out to one another chapter endings that left them with questions, questions that had spurred them on, "because you just have to find out" (Field Notes, 7 March, 1991).

Boots had begun to see the text in more sophisticated ways. He was not just sharing his enjoyment of the story and reliving favourite parts, responses characteristic of the other two levels of response. By forming and expressing the judgement that Clark's writing had been successful in "making him want to keep reading", Boots moved beyond earlier response levels. By so doing he initiated a return to the text and through an examination of the chapter endings he was able to lead his conference group to speculate that questions left in their minds had kept them reading.

Thereafter, Boots used Clark's writing as a standard against which he measured other authors' writing. In another conference group discussion, excerpts from which were quoted earlier in this chapter, Boots explained how Clark's descriptive writing helped him to begin constructing his envisionment. He reported having vivid pictures in his mind of Robin's adventures on Oak Island (Field Notes, 22 May, 1991), pictures he claimed were easy to imagine because of Clark's rich descriptions.

According to Langer (1990, 1991), by reflecting on Clark's writing, Boots had stepped out and objectified his experience (Langer, 1990). Boots' perceptive comments indicated that he was "working at the growing edges of his evaluative abilities" (Hepler,

1982, p. 277). His thinking served to extend his envisionment of the present text and provided the roots for growth in his capacity, and the capacity of his conference group to transact more adequately with literary texts (Rosenblatt, 1984,). By sharing his thoughts with Robin and Tom he not only explored further and refined his own developing understanding, but also scaffolded for them a way to think (Langer, 1991). In this way he helped them to see a feature of the text that they may have been tacitly aware of, or perhaps had not even thought of. Tom's question "are they all like that" points to the latter.

Several books later, however, Tom adopted the stance himself to reflect on a current book and tie it back to *The Hand of Robin Squires*. I had joined the group, to read with them, and we had chosen *After the bomb*. The book had not been my first choice, but once I started to read it I became very involved, and one night did not stop at the page we had agreed to read to. On sharing this with the group the next day, Tom remarked that "yeah, you do want to read more...it's sorta like *The Hand of Robin Squires*...". Boots finished Tom's sentence with "cause it leaves you hanging" (Transcript, 21 March, 1991). Tom continued:

At the end of every chapter, it usually says something that makes you want to read more. Like at the end of Chapter 7 it says - [reading from his book] If the wounded started moving out of the shelters to the hospital, pretty soon there'd be wall to wall bodies there. Then what kind of care would there be? - So like, I wanted to keep reading to see if Philip could get help for his mother.

Transcript, 21 March, 1991.

Tom was immersed in the story, but had been able to distance himself from the story for a moment, in order to return to the text to see what had led to his initial response of

"yeah, you do want to read more". He was now doing on his own an analysis of the text, that weeks before he had been introduced to, and been party to under Boots' guidance.

The children's discussions at this level of response took them beyond the text. They had successfully built envisionments and enjoyably moved through them. They no longer had to spend time on issues that might have gotten in their way of making contact with Gilly and Robin's worlds. Moreover, they had already savoured their experiences in those worlds, recapturing in their discussions the frightening, funny, and fateful moments. They were now using their experience to reflect on their own lives and to ponder on aspects of the text that had kept them moving through it. In this way their envisionments of the text - their understanding - was extended.

Unfortunately, similar perceptive comments were not picked up by the teacher and treated as important occurrences. While her non-interfering presence allowed the children to arrive at their own understandings, it also prevented her from being attuned for those readers who made perceptive offerings, offerings which she might have used as starting points for helping the children develop self-awareness and self-criticism, critical powers which might have helped them grow in their capacities to transact more meaningfully with texts.

Summary

In this chapter I described how Miss Atkins' classroom was organized as a place for readers. Seven of these young readers, four girls and three boys, were also introduced. Using Langer's (1990, 1991) four literary stances as a framework, their

responses, along with the responses of their fellow readers were analyzed. Three levels of response emerged: 1) a level of response that reflected the children's construction and enjoyment of their envisionments, 2) a further level of response that revealed the children's experiences, and reactions to those experiences as they moved through the world of the text, and 3) a final level of response that showed the children's attempts to extend their envisionments beyond the text.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Implications and Recommendations

The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents...[it is] the coming together of text and imagination.

(Iser, 1980, p.54).

Summary of the Study

Purpose and Significance

This research study developed out of an interest in upper elementary classrooms as places for children's imaginations and texts to come together. Many teachers, who share this interest, have turned to children's literature and restructured their classrooms to provide a teaching-learning environment that supports young readers and their attempts to make meaning.

This study of upper elementary children reading in such an environment was guided by an assumption that response to literature develops from what readers themselves experience in relation to the text, and that both cognitive and affective elements shape this experience (Rosenblatt, 1978). From this perspective the study proposed to develop an understanding of these particular ten and eleven year old children's aesthetic involvement with text and their subsequent responses within their classroom Community of Readers.

The shift in reading programs from text books to trade books has raised many questions about what young readers are getting from their reading of literature and about the kinds of responses to expect from them. In addition, teachers are unsure of how to

meet these responses in terms of what to encourage and discourage - what to do in order to help students grow as readers. By examining young readers reading and responses to literature from Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional perspective and in terms of Langer's (1990) literary stances, this study proposed to contribute to understanding reading programs that are based on children's literature and their responses to it.

Procedures

A naturalistic approach and the techniques of ethnography were used to explore these areas of interest. During the inquiry, questions concerning the children's views of reading, the nature of their engagements with texts, and the influence of collaborative talk on their experiences and developing understandings, emerged and were addressed.

An upper elementary classroom was identified, one that allowed children to make meaning that derived not only from the ideas, notions and issues that the text raised (i.e. the cognitive elements), but also from the feelings, attitudes, and assumptions that the children experienced in their journeys through the texts they read. The class I chose was a grade five/six split classroom, one that was organized along the lines of a Readers' Workshop. Given the basics of time, ownership and response within a collaborative setting, the children were given the opportunity to experience text aesthetically, and to construct personal interpretations.

I was a participant-observer in this classroom over a nine month period. Data sources were my field notes, audiotapes and transcripts of interviews and conference group sessions, the children's response journals, as well as teacher documents and classroom artifacts. Data analysis involved the synthesis of information from all sources

and was conducted both concurrently with data collection, and more intensively after most of the data had been gathered.

Findings

As the analysis showed, a number of findings emerged. They are addressed below under the headings of the three research questions.

What is the Children's View of Reading? The children in this particular Community of Readers held reading to be an enjoyable daily activity to be valued because "it's fun", because you "learn about things", and because it helps you "to get along in the world better". Miss Atkins promoted such enjoyment by issuing invitations to read, by allowing a choice in texts, and by providing in-class reading time and the daily opportunity to talk with others about books and reading. This approach served not only the children who came to the class as uncommitted readers, but also those already devoted to books.

Furthermore, the children viewed reading as a social activity. They relied on the testimonies of Miss Atkins and their fellow readers to choose books, and in turn passed on the books they enjoyed to others in the Community. Wide reading was promoted in this way. The children also depended on one another and Miss Atkins to help them make sense out of the books they found difficult or confusing, and collegially relived the journeys they particularly found funny, frightening or fantastic. As well, they opened up possibilities for each other, taking discussions in new directions. A Community of Readers seems an appropriate metaphor for describing this fellowship that built from Miss Atkins' and the children's engagements with each other, and with texts.

What is the Nature of the Children's Engagements With Text? The

children's focus of attention and thinking during and after their reading, which was reflected in their dialogue within the Community, revealed the nature of their engagements with text.

At one level, specifically in the initial stages of constructing envisionments, the children used their imaginations to make contact with the world of the text. Their accounts of this phenomenon focused on a feeling of "being right there". When this failed, they wrote and/or talked their way into envisionments by utilizing the understandings of fellow readers and Miss Atkins to clear up their sources of misunderstanding and confusion.

Building an envisionment and stepping into it seemed to be a first step in the children's quest to make meaning with text. Miss Atkins' instructions to the children, to raise in their conference groups the things they did not understand, the things they were confused about, and parts of the book they were having difficulty with, encouraged and supported response at this level.

On a second level, having successfully stepped into an envisionment, the children's literary experiences were shaped not only by cognitive aspects of meaning, but also by affective considerations. Their expressions of what they were seeing and hearing and feeling as they moved through their envisionments are indicative that they were living-through aesthetic experiences, experiences that had personal meaning to them (Rosenblatt, 1978). As mentioned above, the children traded on each other's lived-

through experiences, using the insights gained through exchange to further their own understanding.

Response at this level was also encouraged by Miss Atkins' modelling in mini-lessons, nudges in response journals, and involvement in conference groups. There were no questions, directions, tests and suggestions from her that would have led the children to a strictly efferent reading of texts. There was no expectation of things to be remembered, or carried away, in terms of facts or information, and no directions as to what the children ought to experience when they chose a particular book. Rather, the children were asked to think back over their reading and to pull out to share with others, through talk and writing, what was for them, personal, vivid and meaningful.

Finally, on a third level, some of these young readers used their literary experiences to rethink ideas, beliefs and feelings they held before reading, and to examine aspects of their reading experience and the text (Langer, 1990). From this reflection on the former, they gained insights into their own lives and on the latter they established a standard against which to measure other authors. Certain individuals in the Community played important roles in initiating and promoting this reflection.

It was not apparent that Miss Atkins promoted response at this level. Using literary experiences to step back and rethink previously held thoughts and opinions, or to step out and objectify reading experiences or the text (Langer, 1991) were not modelled in mini-lessons, nor suggested to the children in response journals.

How Does Talk in Conference Groups Influence the Construction of Meaning? For the children in this study, the opportunity to talk about their reading

in the company of others, an opportunity that they viewed as an important aspect of their Readers' Workshop, actively involved them in making meaning. Talk, as a medium of learning (Barnes, 1976), enabled the children to clarify their misunderstandings and confusions so that they could have personal and meaningful experiences with the books they chose to read. In many cases the journeys that many of the children took were made possible by the help, through talk, that others offered them.

Furthermore, talk enabled the children to prolong the sense of personal experience that so many of them spoke of, and to relive the memorable moments of those experiences. What was noticed and remembered by some often served to extend the envisionments of others. Finally, though limited at this level, talk in conference groups enabled the children to work on understanding that led out of their experiences with stories they connected with, understanding that went beyond the text to their own lives and the craft of writing.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study suggest that an essential first step in the construction of meaning is the successful building of an envisionment. Teachers need to acknowledge that children's initial responses to literature may embody difficulties in understanding, difficulties that may impede the children from stepping into envisionments. It is important, therefore, that teachers build into the day time for children to work through their confusions, to clear up sources of puzzlement, so that they may make contact with the world of the text, step in and begin moving through the envisionment.

The atmosphere in a classroom, which in this study functioned as an inducement for children to participate in and react to their own "poems", suggests that teachers need to establish a milieu free of endless questions and exercise requirements, so that students are open to experience literature aesthetically. For those children who do not discover on their own that texts make possible "intense personal experience" (Rosenblatt, 1982), teachers need to invite them to read with their attention on what they are seeing, hearing and feeling - on what is happening for them as they live through the experience offered by the text. Further to this, teachers need to provide opportunities for these children to interact with students who do read for the aesthetic experience and whose responses reflect their participation in and reactions to their own poems.

One of the findings, that exchange of developing insights and understandings assisted the children to move through their envisionments, reinforces the need for teachers to work at developing the notion of a Community of Readers, where students work together to become better readers. By providing students with Giacobbe's (1986) basics of time, ownership and response teachers will be able to develop a collaborative environment where children will be enabled to work together to recreate literary "works" (Iser, 1978).

The fact that children are able to gain insights into their own lives through their experiences with literature suggests that teachers must reflect on the kind and quality of literature that they select for the classroom. Although teachers cannot plan what students will take from a book, they should nonetheless choose not only books that offer potential insights into the human condition, but also books with enough depth to promote

discussion. Given this, in order that students might reach the level of response where they begin to reflect on their experiences with text, teachers must afford them time in class for prolonged talk about books they have connected with.

The children's insights, gained about life and the craft of writing, raise questions about what other kinds of insights children might gain from their reflections on their literary experiences. The key role that certain individuals in the Community played in scaffolding others' thinking in this direction suggests that ideally, teachers as knowledgeable members of the Community, must actively support students in such attempts and encourage reflection when they are assured that their students have connected with a book, and have lived-through experiences that meant something to them. Moreover, teachers must provide opportunities for those children who display the facility to reflect, to interact and talk with those students who are having difficulty reaching this level of response.

Recommendations for Further Research

As noted in the introduction to this study, elementary aged children's reading and responses to literature within a classroom context have not been extensively researched. The findings of this study provide a basis for further research in this area.

First, the context for this study was that of a classroom Community of Readers. Studies of children this age, reading and responding to literature in similar collaborative communities would be valuable in contributing to our understanding of how they engage with books, construct meaning and extend their understandings.

Second, the time and effort that the children in this study put into making contact with the world of the text so that they could begin building envisionments, suggests a focus for future research. We need a better understanding of this apparently important part of the response process.

Finally, this study raised many questions about how we might meet and intervene to further develop children's understanding. Langer's (1991) work with middle and high school students revealed not only principles of instruction that support students' critical thinking in response to literature, but also exposed conditions in the classroom that "mitigate against students' opportunity to develop their own understandings and interpretations" (p. 34). Similar studies in upper elementary classrooms might shed light on those principles most suitable for supporting this age of children "to rethink their responses and go beyond" (Langer, 1991).

Summary Comment

The time that I spent with the children and teacher of this particular Community of Readers, and the thinking I have done in the company of others to make sense of their reading and thinking, has heartened me to return to my own classroom, and to provide for my students a place where they may engage in increasingly rich transactions with good books.

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APPENDIX A

Possible Daily Plan for a Readers' Workshop

Source: Alberta Education (1990). *Language learning: Teacher's resource manual (Draft)*.

<i>Grouping:</i>	<i>Teacher Focus: Instruction</i>	<i>Time:</i>
Whole Class	-- Possible Mini-lessons -- •Procedural - modelling how to discuss books - modelling for response journals - where materials are kept - other organizational issues •Attitudes - why read for pleasure - finding time to read - collecting and borrowing books •Literature - Focus on authors and illustrators - poetry and other genres - story structure - sharing books (by teachers or students) •Strategies* - choosing books - what to do when you do not know a word - predicting and making inferences - monitoring - does it make sense?	10-15 mins. or longer

B. Student Time for Reading, Discussion and Writing in Response Journals

<i>Grouping options:</i>	<i>Workshop Activities</i>	<i>Time:</i>
Individual &/or Small Group	<u>What students are doing:</u> - forming small groups - choosing a novel together, alone or with others, - MOSTLY READING - aloud or silently... in small groups or with the teacher: - conferencing/ discussing - writing in response journals - listening to read-along tapes - working on a book sharing project	15-40 mins.

-Meanwhile

What teachers are doing:

- conferencing with students individually or in small groups
- helping students to select books
 - reading
 - being a role model
- answering response journals

APPENDIX B

Excerpt From Conference Group Discussion

Gilly, Mandy, Eliza and Selina on *The Green Gables Detectives*

- S1: So, how's everyone enjoying the Green Gables detective?
 S2: I find it is really suspenseful.
 S3: Yeah.
 S1: I can't put it down.
 S4: I wanted to keep reading.
 S1: Yeah, like I, I read past my bedtime and my mom comes up and goes "it's time to go to sleep now".
 S1: I have two questions.
 S2: Okay.
 S1: The first one is...who do you think was pounding at the door?
 S4: I'm not sure.
 S2: Who's pounding at the door?
 S3: Remember at the very end...she goes out and she (inaudible) in, and the guy's pounding on the door?
 S4: I think it's another person that's going to come in and then...
 S2: And kill her.
 S3: No. and like in..
 S4: It might be the people, like, another person in the thing, but if he's an actor and he's just coming in...
 S1: Maybe. Oh, um, I have another question.
 S4: Okay.
 S1: Who do you think is the murderer?
 S2: That lady.
 S3: Yeah.
 S2: ...With the sandles and...
 S1: It's too obvious. Too obvious. My guess is A.P. Cole. You know the actor guy.
 S4: I think it's that lady in the sandles.
 S1: You know when she was murdered?
 S2: Uh hum
 S3: He...
 S1: No, the lady that was murdered at the end?
 S3: Oh yeah
 S2: You know in mysteries it's never the person you think it is, so she might be right.
 S1: Because...like you know...and when...and then he went into the kitchen to get a glass of tea, and then he was gone while the murder happened...
 S3: Yeah
 S1: ...and there's some stairs from the kitchen, remember they said?
 S4: Oh yeah.

S3: Upstairs.

S2: It's never the person you think it is, at first.

S1: So I think it's A.P. Cole, but I'm not sure yet.

S4: It might be?

S3: Yeah.

S2: I think this would be really neat if it was like in real life.

S1: This might be in real life, you know.

S3: I liked, I liked the way, the beginning started out, like you, you think that it's a real real mystery.

S2: Yeah like it's...

S3: Then you're like...

S2: Then they see something shivering and shifting in the night.

APPENDIX C

Response Journal

Dear Ms.

Nov. 5, 1990

I found Mr. Klimoviz was an interesting writer. But I'm surprised he hasn't read some of the books I have! I have read (since I don't have a book at the moment) The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugarc by Roald Dahl and the ending is just like the book Bay for he tells about his life during the war. All you have to do is read the story and you feel like you are there! The most exciting part that I thought was when he was in East Africa fighting. In the war when his plane goes down from being hit by a German plane. But he manages to escape from the blazing wreckage of his old Gladiator. I can't think of what I would do if I was in that situation, I would probably think I was going to die. [And to think the army shipped him around into so many countries like rags and he doesn't have feelings for there is a person in there. When I was about 5 or 6 my great-grandpa told me some stories about his experience in the German war for he was a sailor! I bet Roald Dahl is counting his blessings for surviving the war and he even made money on telling about it! If I went through what Roald Dahl went through I might be in a asylum by now!

APPENDIX D

Master Recording Sheet for October 15-20

GROUPS	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Amanda Shariffa Keri Camille 1	Chapter 13 pg. 128	Chapter 16 pg. 151	end of the book	2 Chapters	Finish Book
Gordon Mike Ujal Sean 2	End Chapt. 11	end of chapt. 6	End of book	End of Book	end of Book
Alyssa Heather S. Krissy Katie 3	pg. 79 chapter 11	/	Up to Chpt 11	pg 14 chapter 6. 14.	chapter 17 pg 120
Steven Chris H. Chris P. Scott 4	Finish Book.	Finish Book	Finish Book 56	Finish Book 56.	Finish Book
Jaimi Heather G Naïla 5	End of chapter pg 151 pg 152	to pg 125	end of page 137	End of page 163	End of Pg. 192 chapter 11
Dylan Liam Shane Jason 6	Chapter 6 pg. 58	finish the book	Chapter 5 pg 11	UP to Chapter 10	Finish Book Finish book
Lisa S Laurel Alice 7	up to p. 82 Chapter 6	up to chapter 8	up to chapter 9	up to chapter 12	Finish the book
Greg Peter 8	Up to 115	Up to 133	to chapter 20!	End of pg 161	Up to End pg. 182 of Book

APPENDIX E

Johnny's Reading Record

Date	Title	Author
Sept. 10	Choose your own adventure 1. The Perfect Planet	Edward Packard
Sept. 24	2. Mystery of the vanishing visitor	Seymour Fleishman
Sept. 30	3. Mystery of the midnight message	Seymour Fleishman
Oct. 7	4. Mystery of the whispering voice	Seymour Fleishman
Oct. 14	Wild Man Of The Woods	Joan Clark
Oct. 15	Jim Abbott Against All Odds	Ellen Emerson White
Oct. 16	Hockey heroes	Richard Beales
Oct. 17	Titanic	Robert D. Ballor
Oct. 18	Green apple street Blues	Ted Staunton
Oct. 21	Great minds think alike	Ted Staunton
Oct. 23	Stage fright	James howe
Oct. 28	The Cartoonist	Carol Newsom
Nov. 2	Ice Magic	Matt Christopher
Nov. 6	False Face	Welwyn Wilton Katz
Nov. 9	Snake Trouble	Ruskin Bond
Nov. 12	Wolf	Laura Baur
Nov. 18	Ms Teeny Wonderful	Martyn Godfrey
Nov. 23	The Mystery of the Missing Treasure	Janet Lorimer
Nov. 30	My side of the mountain	Jean George
Dec 7	The Not Just Anybody Family	Betsy Byars
Dec 10	Prehistoric Animals	Marie Farré
Dec 12	The Book of Inventions and Discoveries	Jean-Louis Besson
Jan. 11	code Red At The Supernatural	Eric Wilson
Jan. 13	The book of mountains	Laurence Ottenheimer
Jan. 17	There's an awful lot of weeds in our neighborhood	Colin McNaughton
Jan. 23	The celery stalks at midnight	James Howe
Jan. 25	Cracker Jackson	Betsy Byars

Date	Title	Author
Jan. 25	Ships and seafarers	Dominique Duviard
Feb. 4	Underground to Canada	Barbara Smucker
Feb. 10	The Railroader	Bernice Thurmon Hunter
Feb. 15	The Thief	Ian Needle
Feb. 19	Teeth and Fangs	Roger Dievart
Feb. 28	After the Bomb	Gloria D. Miklowitz
Mar. 12	The Wish Giver	Bill Brittain
Mar. 1	Who's been sleeping in my porridge	Colin McNaughton
Mar. 27	Amish Adventure	Barbara Smucker
Apr. 23	The Hand Of Robin Squires	Joan Clark
Apr. 30	Fantastic Mr. Fox	Ronald Dahl
May. 2	The Zucchini Warriors	Gordon Korman
May. 18	The Mummy the will and the crypt	John Bellairs
May. 9	Choose Your Own Adventure	Edward Packard
June. 2	Paper Story	
June. 10	Choose Your Own Adventure	Edward Packard