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What is Reading? Children's Perspectives on Reading in a Primary School.

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SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

What is reading?
Children's perspectives on reading in a primary school

Cara Doxey

A Dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctorate in Education

July 2023

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.

2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.

4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.

5. The word count of the thesis is 60,000.

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Abstract

Drawing on research findings from an ethnographic study conducted with children in a primary school, this thesis examines how 9- and 10-year-olds experience, think and feel about reading in a Year 5 classroom in the north of England. Informed by sociocultural perspectives on literacy, this study explored children's perspectives on reading activities and strategies in their school.

A history of reading in primary schools in England provides context for the study and I consider the influence of statutory and non-statutory guidance since the introduction of The Education Act in 1988 (DfEE), looking at how classroom practice has been shaped in response to governance and monitoring. Against a backdrop of high-stakes testing, with pressure on schools and teachers to achieve improved outcomes, I explore what reading has become for the children in Amber class.

Over the course of an 8-month period, I visited Amber class to learn about the children's views of reading and observe reading in the classroom. Children's voices were privileged through the use of photo-elicitation interviews and their contributions formed the focus of the study. Participant observation and photographs were used to clarify particular themes and data were analysed using thematic analysis. This process highlighted four themes: purpose, time, choice and progress. Recognising identities as social, fluid and multiple (Atkinson, 2017), I examined how the children were positioned through the activities and strategies used to teach reading and considered the range of identities made available to them in school: staged reader, accurate reading and pleasure reader.

Findings highlighted that the children recognised the purpose of reading in school was to improve future life chances with success in exams. 'Good' readers were generally identified in relation to reading skills such as decoding and comprehension techniques associated with exam success. Progress was a key consideration and the children positioned themselves against each other and in relation to the hierarchical approach to reading adopted in the school. This had a range of consequences for those at the lower end of the hierarchy who struggled with confidence and self-esteem. Although the children valued reading for pleasure, this did not appear to be a priority. Additionally, it was assumed that reading involved decoding physical texts and wider references to reading involving images and digital texts were minimal. In light of these findings, recommendations are made for developing a broader understanding of what counts as reading in school.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study examines how children experience, think and feel about schooled reading[1] in one Year 5 classroom – Amber Class. It explores the meaning of reading for the children involved and looks to understand how children are positioned in relation to reading activities they experience and the significance in terms of their developing reading identities. Their views and opinions are considered against a backdrop of wider research and policy.

In this chapter, I will discuss the background to the thesis exploring my experiences of reading from my childhood through to my present role as a teacher-educator at Sheffield Hallam University. I briefly consider the impact of testing on children's experiences of reading in England and outline the research questions for the study. I will argue that the approaches to reading used in Amber class position children in certain ways and serve to limit the reading identities available to them.

I begin by explaining my interest in this topic and its significance in my understanding of reading and in particular reading for pleasure.

1.2 Background

Listening to stories as a child both at home and at school had a profound effect on me and contributed to my passion for reading. The experience gives "voice and breadth to a text", delivering the "full range of its force and meaning" (Barrs & Cork, 2001, p.216) and such experiences encouraged me to develop a positive attitude to

[1] Street (1984) suggests that when literacy is presented as a set of skills, independent of cultural context and meaning, it can be described as 'autonomous'. He suggests that this can be thought of as the 'schooled' view of literacy.

reading, viewing it as a pleasurable and worthwhile activity. I recall listening to my Year 6 teacher reading books aloud to the class: *I Am David* (Holm, A., 2010), *Walkabout* (Marshall, 1970) and *The Twits* (Blake, Q. & Dahl, 2016). We were allowed to rest our heads on the desk and listen as our teacher read the stories at the end of the day. I also remember my mother sitting next to me in bed reading *101 Dalmatians* (Smith, D., 1956). I enjoyed the book so much that I went on to read it myself seven times. This led a to lifelong interest in reading. I studied English literature at A level and degree. As part of a Bachelor of Education degree, lecturers introduced me to a wide range of children's fiction, speaking positively about authentic[2] texts. However, there was less enthusiasm for reading schemes; I remember one lecturer throwing a scheme book called *The Castle* across the room in disgust.

I started teaching in 1995 in a school that was described by the local education authority as being socio-economically disadvantaged. Using the guidance from my university course, I focused on developing the children's love of literature with authentic texts. I read aloud daily to my class, spent my own money on books and encouraged independent reading. Although I cannot say for certain that all of the children in my class developed a love of literature, I do feel that reading was something they viewed positively, particularly when I read aloud. However, when I asked for advice from colleagues about children who did not perform well in reading tests, I was directed to scheme books, word lists to send home and various

[2] The use of the term 'authentic' has been used as a reaction to the "prefabricated patterns of the textbook" and can be thought of as materials created for native speakers, including "ideas, words, phrases and expressions that are heard and read in real-life situations" (Ciornei & Dina, 2015, p.275). In this study, 'authentic texts' refers to the written texts which have not been created specifically to support schooled reading.

resources to support decoding. The English coordinator was particularly enthusiastic about a new set of scheme books that had recently been purchased called *The Castle* – the book I had witnessed being thrown across the room at university. No one ever suggested paying attention to supporting children in making good choices, discussing texts or reading aloud. This marked the beginning of my confusion regarding schooled reading. Should the focus be on pleasure with authentic texts or improving skills that would be tested - or a balance of both?

In 1997 I moved schools to an affluent area and during my first year as a Year 5 teacher, the government introduced *The National Literacy Strategy* (DfEE, 1998). I found that in this new school, I had much less control over how reading was delivered in my classroom. I was directed to comprehension exercises from commercial workbooks and used novels selected by the English coordinator. Internal and external testing outcomes provided numerical values which represented children's attainment in reading. Those considered to be 'behind' received extra input from teaching assistants. To improve skills, they read lists of words aloud and read aloud from scheme books. Outcomes in external tests for reading were generally good and writing was the focus during my time at the school; promoting a love of reading seemed a low priority. Staff members bemoaned the disappearance of reading aloud as they struggled to squeeze it into their busy timetables. I did manage to include reading aloud as part of my approach to reading, but I did it secretly, fearing that it would be stopped should members of the senior management find out.

Over the fifteen years I spent at the school, I focused less and less on promoting enjoyment in reading and more on tasks designed to develop improved outcomes in tests such as comprehension exercises. I found it difficult to resist the pressure from the senior management where performance was judged on the basis of children's

test scores. Conversations with parents confirmed that many children lacked enthusiasm for reading and I regularly advised reading aloud, library visits, buying books, etc. but in a school that focused primarily on outcomes, it was difficult to make a difference.

My experience as the parent of a reluctant reader gave me an insight into the impact that poor motivation can have on a child. Despite a positive start to reading in a household that provided language opportunities similar to the school environment - a factor often associated with academic success (Heath, 1983; Wells, 2009) - my son's enthusiasm for reading diminished significantly during Key Stage 2. He recalls enjoying listening to the teacher read aloud, identifying *Horrid Henry* (Simon & Ross, 2000) books as particularly enjoyable, and also enjoying listening to story tapes in the car. However, he generally viewed reading books as difficult and to be avoided; at 12 years old he was tested and confirmed as dyslexic.

My son's experiences at secondary school probably undermined his confidence in reading. Although his support package specifically stated that he should not read aloud in class, his teachers frequently instructed him to do so leading to feelings of embarrassment. Additionally, other children mocked him for his low attainment when they saw 'levels' stuck to the front of books. He did, however, enjoy lessons with one teacher who delivered sessions based on the play: *The Blood Brothers* (Russell, 2016). He engaged with the text, volunteered to play the lead role in class and on his advice, we went to see a theatre production.

Although he excelled in practical subjects such as Physical Education and Design Technology, the academic focus made General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams difficult. I do not know his final GCSE outcomes as he collected the

results from school and threw them away. When he left school aged 16 years he lacked confidence and had low self-worth generally, but particularly in relation to reading and writing.

Given all of this, as a teacher I became interested in the available resources for low-attaining, reluctant readers. Findings in a report by The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) stated that low-attaining children in Key Stage 2 often experienced a lack of independence when selecting texts as the books they wanted to read were too difficult. This led to reading being viewed as a ‘chore’; the availability of books for low-attaining children was limited (HMI, 2004, p.13). I wondered if I could actively do something to address this gap.

A colleague and I co-authored *The Janksters* series (Cid & Mo, 2013) - fiction books aimed at reluctant and/or low-attaining readers in Key Stage 2 - paying particular attention to the number of words on a page, sentence length and readability. However, with regard to inspiring these readers to read for pleasure, we began to realise that the provision of suitable resources was a small part of a complex issue; this led me to examine my own relationship with reading.

We founded *The Reading Allowed Project* in 2013 (Doxey & McHenry, 2018) with the aim of encouraging social mobility for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds by promoting reading for pleasure. Older children (usually Year 5 and 6 pupils) were partnered with younger children. Sitting on special blankets, the older children read aloud to their partners from books that we had selected, usually funny picture books. Using semi-structured interviews with children and teachers, we found that the children appeared to have enjoyed the project and felt greater confidence and more positive attitudes towards reading as a result. The

vast majority also made progress as judged by standard assessment tests (SATs) – an area of most interest for headteachers considering adopting the project in school.

Although reading aloud was central to the study, the findings encouraged me to consider reading more broadly. Possible factors influencing the positive outcomes may have related to choice, relationships and a suitable environment. The children were also enthused by the lack of any written outcome or questioning; we discouraged the older children from asking ‘teacher-like’ questions encouraging them instead to discuss the book in a similar fashion to a tv programme or film. This, I believe, encouraged the view of reading as a pleasurable activity, introducing children to the purposes of reading as a provider of “enlightenment, comfort and delight” (Goodwin, 2011, p.5). For these readers, this approach avoided the pressure and embarrassment associated with reading independently from texts where a child is recognised by the rest of the class as a ‘struggling’ reader, working on skills that others have mastered years before (Goodwin, 1995). The project illustrated that children who might be considered ‘behind’, ‘struggling’ or ‘reluctant’ in one context, could present as enthusiastic and engaged in another. Reading Allowed offered the children the opportunity to position themselves as successful readers.

These experiences led me to become interested in the reading identities that children develop in school: What identities are available? How do children take these up? What role does the teacher take in this process? Rather than simply considering a child as ‘reluctant’ or ‘struggling’, I began to consider how identities could be multiple and fluid as children engaged in different ways with different texts.

This led to an interest in the reading identities offered to children in school by teachers working to manage the pressure of testing alongside their own beliefs about reading and the role of reading for pleasure.

1.3 High-stakes testing and reading for pleasure

The pressure to achieve outcomes in standardised tests (see section 2.3.1) seems influential in terms of how reading is conceptualised; reading is often presented as a hierarchical skill that can be measured (Tennent, 2020). In England, the results of SATs combined with the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) outcomes, provide evidence for Ofsted inspectors about a school's achievements in English and maths and published league tables of SAT scores allow for comparison with other schools. Testing in this environment can be considered as 'high-stakes'. However, as teachers focus on outcomes, practices that support reading as a pleasurable activity can often be squeezed out (Hempel-Jorgensen, Cremin, T., Harris, & Chamberlain, 2018).

Given the context, I was particularly interested in conducting the research with Mr Dickens. I had worked with Mr Dickens previously in my capacity as a children's author and literacy consultant at a different school. I knew him to be an enthusiastic reader. He had recently been appointed as deputy headteacher at Rainside Primary – a school that might be considered 'successful' in terms of SAT and Ofsted outcomes - taking up his role in September 2018.

My original intention was to consider the children's experiences and perceptions of reading in what I had assumed would be an environment that focused particularly on reading for pleasure. Research had pointed to the tendency of schools in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage to focus on reading as a skill with minimal time

afforded to activities and strategies designed to promote reading for pleasure (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). My assumption was, that in a school that achieved positive outcomes in SATs and Ofsted inspections, teachers would have more flexibility to deliver a curriculum that supported children in becoming enthusiastic readers. However, as will be explored in the thesis, it was notable that external factors constrained what was possible, even in the classroom of such an enthusiastic teacher. As such, although the children *valued* reading for pleasure, the activities and strategies in the classroom focused more on developing reading proficiency.

This study explores how 9- and 10-year-olds experience, think and feel about reading in a school with low levels of socio-economic disadvantage (using Free School Meals as a proxy), consistently good outcomes for SATs in reading and with a teacher who enjoys reading. It considers children's understanding of schooled reading activities, looking at how they are positioned and the effect on their reading identities. Attention is paid to reading for pleasure and I consider what role this has in the children's interpretations of schooled reading. By privileging children's views of reading as it is experienced in the final years of primary school, I hoped to understand the significance of activities and strategies at a time when schools are under pressure to achieve outcomes in high-stakes tests. I believe that such insights are important in understanding the effects of policy on decisions made by schools and teachers which subsequently influence the reading identities made available to children in school.

1.4 Research questions

I decided that the following research questions would facilitate my understanding of schooled reading. Questions 1 and 2 aim to provide an over-arching understanding

of schooled reading in relation to children's reading identities with question 3 drilling down into the children's views and beliefs.

1. What is valued about reading in school?

I hoped to learn about values in relation to reading; which practices did the children feel were valued and why? I felt that this information would support my understanding of how children understood schooled reading, digging deeper into the views and beliefs that underpinned how reading was taught and experienced in school.

2. In what ways are children positioned in relation to schooled reading?

I was also interested to find out about what was involved in being a reader and the kinds of readers the children were becoming; what was the relationship between schooled reading and their developing reading identities?

3. How do children experience, think and feel about reading in school?
    a) What reading activities and strategies do children experience in school?
    b) How do children engage with these reading activities and strategies?
    c) What are children's perceptions of these reading activities and strategies?

I hoped to learn about the activities and strategies which were important to the children. By developing a better understanding of how children experience, think and feel about reading in school I hoped to consider the potential influence of policy and high-stakes testing in the classroom.

In Chapter 5 I present the children's perceptions of reading in Amber class, exploring how they experience, think and feel about schooled reading. Based on these findings, I argue that more value is attached to certain approaches to reading leading

to particular reading identities being made available to children at the expense of others. I suggest that there is a need to reconsider the current approach to teaching and testing reading in England's primary schools.

1.5 Outline of thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 explores how the teaching of reading has been approached in primary schools in England over the last 30 years. I begin with a discussion about how reading has been understood and researched from a range of perspectives. Identities and reading identities are explored, recognising the influence of various theoretical positions. I also provide a brief history of reading education policy in England including the role of high-stakes testing and consider the impact of testing and policy on the reading activities and strategies in school.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approaches of the study, justifying the use of an interpretivist ethnographic approach and my own role as a researcher within the study. I outline the research design and provide details of the methods used which included photo-elicitation interviews and participant observation. I also consider ethical concerns and how these were addressed.

Chapter 4 outlines the approach to analysis and provides details of thematic analysis and the phases involved.

Chapter 5 examines the findings from this study. I outline the four themes: purpose of reading, time, choice and progress. The 'purpose of reading' explores emotional responses to reading and considers differences between reading at home and school. The themes of time, choice and progress examine how children experience, think and feel about schooled reading activities and strategies.

Chapter 6 considers how certain forms of reading are valued more highly than others by the children exploring the impact of high-stakes testing in schools and its influence on how reading is understood and taught in Rainside Primary School. I also explore how children are positioned in relation to the reading activities and strategies and the significance of these in relation to their developing reading identities. The reading identities available to the children in Amber class are:

- Staged reader
- Accurate reader
- Pleasure reader

I argue for a broader understanding of what reading is with increased opportunities for children to develop a wider range of reading identities.

In Chapter 7 I outline a range of implications for consideration, provide details regarding the limitations of the study and highlight opportunities for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Literacy and Reading

Literacy is central to our everyday lives. It has been argued that it has the power to eradicate society's ills, provide an avenue for personal development (Bialostok & Whitman, 2006; Ong, 2013; Street, 1997) and enable positive identity transformations (Ahearn, 2004; Riemer, 2008). However, definitions of what literacy *is* can vary; literacy is a contested and evolving term (Hofkins & Northen, 2009). Interpretations of literacy have implications for our understanding of reading: what it is and how it is taught.

Long (2011) suggests that literacy is the ability to read and write where the importance of achieving an "appropriate level of fluency" in each has been viewed as one of the main aims of compulsory education (Blake, D. & Hanley, 1995, p.89). This offers a limited view of literacy and does not appear to consider the contributions of the reader or writer in the process, the range of purposes for reading and writing and the variety of texts available. Moreover, the suggestion that there is an *appropriate* level for individuals to achieve suggests that it is possible for reading and writing to have certain standards against which children can be judged.

An alternative definition of literacy offers a more expansive view, describing literacy as:

> the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices (Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson, 2016)

This view recognises the literacy processes involved in the production (for example, writing) and receipt of a text (for example, reading), which can be both written and

spoken including image, sound and gesture. It also suggests that literacy is a social practice and can vary according to context.

A wider view of literacy encourages us to interpret reading as more than simply encoding and decoding written text. Hodges (2016) supports this view and believes that the role of the reader is central to the reading process and requires active engagement. He also points out that any reference to 'text' may also include still and moving image. Grabe and Stoller (2013) concur highlighting that definitions of reading which focus simply on a reader's ability to take information from a text, fail to account for the different ways people engage with texts, the skills and processes involved, the variability of reading in another language and the social context of the reading event. This broader view of reading encourages consideration of the types of readers children become, the range of texts available and their reasons for reading.

To consider how children experience, think and feel about reading in school, it is important to understand the research underpinning reading in schools. I will now explore how reading can be conceptualised from different perspectives and discuss the implications of each for reading pedagogy.

2.1.1 Reading from a psycholinguistic perspective

Proponents of a psycholinguistic understanding of reading assume a non-staged process where *meaning* is viewed as important and the process is problem-solving in nature (Hall, Kathy, 2002). According to Goodman (1986), there are three cueing systems that the reader draws on to make sense of a text: graphophonic, semantic and syntactic. He believed that readers use these cueing systems simultaneously during reading and that they should not be studied in isolation, suggesting that this would lead to "non-language abstractions" (pp.38-39). Supporters of this approach to

reading, such as Meek (2011), point to the importance of authentic texts (see section 1.2) rather than teaching skills out of context; the term 'whole language' has often been used to describe this contextualised approach to reading (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022).

Reading from a psycholinguistic perspective values the contribution of the reader and considers meaning-making to be a transaction between the reader and the text (Goodman, 1992). This approach to meaning-making is central to Rosenblatt's transaction theory (1986). She viewed reading as a transaction that occurs between a certain text and a certain reader at a certain time. She suggests that there is a distinction between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reading (Rosenblatt, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1986). *Efferent* reading is principally concerned with the information a reader can take from the text and the power lies predominantly with the text. *Aesthetic* reading assigns more weight to the reader and what they bring to the reading event with an emphasis on the experience of reading. The role of the reader – their background and context – is emphasised in the transaction. Rather than assuming that texts have one true meaning, the role of the reader is viewed as an important part of the transaction. Meaning is created between the reader and the text in a particular context; it is something unique and separate from the input and influences (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). Smagorinsky (2001) supports this view suggesting that readers create 'new' texts each time they read; the active reader makes links with prior texts and experiences within a certain context to create meaning.

2.1.2 Reading from a cognitive perspective

Experimental research from a cognitive psychological perspective on reading centres on an individual's mental processing, motivation and ability. A cognitive understanding of reading privileges word identification and suggests that this is a

precursor to comprehension, highlighting the importance of orthographic knowledge compared to semantic or syntactic knowledge (Hall, Kathy, 2010).

Working from this perspective, Petscher et al. (2020) highlight experimental and quasi-experimental studies as providing the "strongest causal credibility" (p.269) in relation to identifying the best teaching methods; this view is based on the understanding that there are common skills that can be taught. Once these skills are learned, it is understood that children will have the ability to access a range of information and texts. The term 'science of reading' (SOR) (Semingson & Kerns, 2021) has been used to refer to the knowledge accumulated by such methods. Although a review of research from a SOR perspective is beyond the scope of this study, I will explore key areas which I believe are particularly relevant to my study including phonics, vocabulary, engagement and motivation. I will also consider the use of standardised measurements as indicators of success in relation to the approaches considered.

A cognitive psychological approach to reading recognises the importance of being able to decode words but also highlights that these skills are not sufficient on their own (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). Gough and Tunmer (1986) proposed the Simple View of Reading (SVoR) model to explain the reading process and it is built on the premise that 'reading' is the comprehension of written text and the product of decoding and listening comprehension:

$$\text{Reading} = \text{Decoding} \times \text{Comprehension}$$[3]

[3] Decoding was recognised as the ability to decode words in isolation and comprehension referred to listening comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). The two terms used more recently by Hoover and Tumner (Hoover & Tunmer, 2022) are 'word recognition' and language (or linguistic) comprehension.

The model suggests that reading is the product of word recognition and language comprehension rather than the sum of the two concepts suggesting that one cannot occur without the other. The SVoR model has been criticised for portraying reading as a sequential process where word recognition (decoding) occurs first followed by language (or listening) comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The SVoR has been integrated into the expectations for early reading teaching in England and I expand on this in section 2.3.3.

Research from a SOR perspective reflects this sequential view and points to the 'stages' of reading. Ehri (2020) suggests that readers progress through alphabetic phases in their reading development: pre-alphabetic; partial alphabetic; full alphabetic; and consolidated alphabetic. Ehri (2020) believes that the use of 'authentic' texts in the 'pre-reading' stage would have little impact on reading progress without learning the foundational skills first. Based on an analysis of her own and colleagues' research, Ehri (2020) argues that prior to reading 'whole words' children should be taught grapheme-phoneme relations and develop the ability to 'decode' unfamiliar words.

However, Hoover and Tumner (2018) argue that it was never their intention to present reading as sequential. They suggest that the SVoR describes the cognitive *capacities* involved (for example, the ability to recognise words) rather than the cognitive *processes* (for example, the cognitive operations involved in recognising words). The SVoR, they suggest, emphasises the *equal* importance of decoding and language comprehension in reading (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). However, although arguing that the model is not sequential, Hoover and Tumner (2022) *do* suggest that the ability to recognise words in isolation is the "most important" element in reading development (p.401). Recognising the value of teaching children to "break-the-code-

of-print" (Turbill, 2001, p.274), Petscher et al. (2020) suggest that the best method for teaching children how to decode words is systematic instruction in phonics.

Phonics refers to an approach whereby children are taught to recognise the link between sounds (phonemes) and individual letters or groups of letters (graphemes). Johnston, McGeown and Watson (2012) examined approaches to teaching phonics and looked at the long-term effects of analytic and synthetic phonics instruction with 10-year-old children.[4] They found that children receiving synthetic phonics instruction performed better in standardised tests of word reading, comprehension and spelling than those taught using analytic phonics (for a more detailed discussion, see section 2.3.3). However, the suggestion that synthetic phonics is the most effective method for teaching children to read has been questioned. Wyse and Bradbury (2022) conducted a systematic qualitative meta-synthesis of 55 experimental trials and suggest that the privileging of synthetic phonics as a primary method for teaching children to read is not supported by research. Furthermore, they suggest that the use of phonics should be considered in relation to the 'whole language' method and that success in reading is likely to be achieved through a more balanced approach (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022). However, Torgersgon, Brooks, Gascoine and Higgins (2019) have questioned the validity of the research used in Wyse and Bradbury's study pointing to the possible influences of design and publication bias. They suggest that phonics should be included in early reading policy but recommend that large-scale randomised controlled trials are needed before researchers are able to decide which approaches are most effective. There is not, they suggest, a sufficient evidence base

[4] There are 2 different types of phonics: analytic and synthetic. Analytic phonics develops phonemic awareness through working from whole words and does not focus on sounds in isolation. Synthetic phonics is a term used to describe the process whereby children are taught grapheme-phoneme correspondences; phonemes are 'blended' together to develop word reading skills.

to justify the sole use of *synthetic* phonics. In an attempt to illustrate the effectiveness of particular approaches to teaching reading, studies from a SOR perspective tend to rely on measurable outcomes as proof of efficacy (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021).

The focus on word recognition in the reading process has led researchers to explore the effects of reading fluency (speed and accuracy of decoding) based on the assumption that efficient decoding frees up processing capacity thereby enabling readers to comprehend texts more easily (Perfetti, Marron, & Foltz, 1996). Rollanda (2018) examined the impact of reading aloud training (where children are taught to read out loud) on children aged 6 to 9 years who were described as 'dysfluent'. She points to an optimum rate of reading: for children aged 6 to 7 years this was 35 to 75 words per minute and for children aged 8 to 9 years this was 40 to 90 words per minute. Once this rate of fluency is achieved there is little advantage to be gained in reading comprehension from faster reading rates.

Metsala and David (2022) researched the impact of a reading program that focused on phonological awareness, grapheme-phoneme correspondence and decoding (including instruction on pseudowords - words that can be constructed in the English language but are considered as 'not real', for example, 'sud'). They found that 8-year-old children who were described as having 'fluency-defined disabilities' made gains in fluency (time taken to read a text combined with the number of errors) and comprehension (ability to answer multiple choice questions relating to a given text).

Studies exploring vocabulary development point to a correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension (Ricketts, Nation, & Bishop, 2007; Sénéchal, Ouellette, & Rodney, 2006). However, finding appropriate strategies to improve children's

vocabulary has proved more difficult (Cervetti et al., 2020). Schooling appears to have a limited impact on children's vocabulary growth (Christian, Morrison, Frazier, & Massetti, 2000) and there is little knowledge about how interventions might help (Wright & Cervetti, 2017).

Research relating to engagement and motivation in reading is also extensive. Engagement can be thought of as a reader's involvement with a text whereas motivation describes the emotions, thoughts and beliefs involved (Unrau & Quirk, 2014). Research suggests that the two are related. Opportunities to engage affectively with texts can lead to improved motivation over time (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000) and motivation has been linked to achievement in reading (Park, 2011; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2008). Researchers have considered the dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with intrinsic motivation being reported as more beneficial for reading development (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation describes motivation related to the task itself whereas extrinsically motivated learners wish to achieve a reward or some sort of external satisfaction (Park, 2011). It is reported that children who are successful in reading appear to enjoy reading more and are intrinsically motivated whereas those who struggle seem to enjoy reading less and are less intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan, R. M. & Deci, 2000). Additionally, the use of extrinsic motivation in the form of rewards appears to be negatively or not significantly linked with comprehension performance (Becker, Mcelvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Park, 2011; Taboada et al., 2008; Wang & Guthrie, 2004).

Improvements in comprehension are often measured in self-constructed or standardised reading tests and assume an understanding of text comprehension as

a unitary construct that can be measured. However, rather than being unitary, Duke (2005) argues that text comprehension is componential and Tennent (2014) suggests it incorporates linguistic processes and knowledge factors along with cognitive and metacognitive processes. These components are not easily separated, arguably making the option of measuring comprehension as a uniform construct impossible (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). Additionally, although reading assessments might be presented as neutral measures of reading skills, test performance can be linked to cultural background (McCullough, 2013; Moore, 1996; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, & Anderson, 1982), purposes for reading and prior knowledge (Freebody, Luke, & Gilbert, 1991; Takayama, 2018) and cultural values (Banks, 2012). The reliance on test outcomes can present a limited view of reading.

Street (1984) considered the view of literacy as a skill that could be measured as 'autonomous'. He suggested that it offers an understanding of the processes involved rather than the purposes for engaging with literacy thereby making it possible for educators to pinpoint those who 'lack' literacy. The process of classifying children, Street argued, leads to the creation of inequality with advantages for those who 'gain' literacy compared to those who are seen to be 'in deficit'. He proposed that when literacy is presented as neutral and objective, policymakers can justify making decisions about literacy programmes and assessments based on the understanding that their view is the natural and accepted version of literacy. Street (2005) described how the dominant 'autonomous' model, which is prevalent in schools in England, is assumed to promote equality by developing higher cognitive skills through the acquisition of literacy presented as 'neutral' and 'universal'. He argued that this form of literacy is, in fact, ideological as it "disguises the cultural and

ideological assumptions that underpin it" and asserts which literacy 'counts' and how this form of literacy should be acquired (pp. 417-418).

Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) argue that the focus on measurable outcomes can lead to a narrow view of reading and the role of the reader. They propose that the SOR should adopt a wider view of reading, acknowledging its links to writing (Graham, 2020), oracy (Boyd & Markarian, 2015) and the use of multimodal texts in meaning-making (Graham, 2020). Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2016) explain that readers should be encouraged to adopt an active role, developing the capacity and will to engage passionately with texts that recognise and support their linguistic and cultural differences. A 'socially just' view of reading would provide a more meaningful approach, relevant to all learners with assessments that acknowledge and value differences and capacities, rather than "narrowly focusing on the extent to which they measure up to goals on a particular metric" (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021, p.95).

Comber and Kamler (2004) suggest that teachers "have been inducted into counter-productive discourses" (p. 293) that label particular groups as 'deficit'. However, studies adopting a view of literacy as a social practice challenge this view. Researchers have found that children who appear to 'struggle' with 'autonomous' approaches to reading, display positive attitudes toward reading activities with allow for choice, personal opinion and collaboration (Triplett, 2007). Research from this perspective, known as New Literacy Studies, aims to explore the nature of literacy and how it is used.

2.1.3 Literacy as a social practice

New Literacy Studies (NLS) mark a move away from the approaches to literacy that draw on a psychological model although the 'new' in 'New Literacy Studies' does not refer to 'forms' of literacy but rather to the studies themselves (Street, 2011). Barton and Hamilton (2012) describe literacy as a tool for communication, enabling different social groups with different social rules to develop certain literacies for certain social purposes. Rather than privileging one form of literacy, researchers aim to understand literacy more widely, often by investigating home and school literacy practices and events.

The view of literacy from a NLS perspective regards literacy as a "social practice" with the term "literacy practice" being used to focus on the "social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" (Street, 1984, p.1). Consideration is given to literacy practices in school, at home and in the community as researchers aim to explore what constitutes literacy for those involved. Street (2012a) suggested that the view of literacy as a social practice has implications for the significance of informal learning in school, recognising the value of building upon reading and writing practices in everyday life and where social life embraces school. He suggested that it represents a shift from the 'autonomous' model of literacy where skills are seen as something to be acquired and built upon, leading to improved equality and better economic performance, "irrespective of social conditions and cultural interpretations of literacy" (p.417). The view of literacy as a social practice, Street (2005) argued, recognises the value of literacy in different contexts where an individual's approach to reading and writing is always rooted in their "conceptions of knowledge, identity and being" (p.418). According to Street (2011), an 'ethnographic perspective' can help to challenge the simplistic view of literacy in schools which he

described as “one-dimensional and culturally narrow”. Through researching literacy as a social practice, he suggested that researchers can help to address the fundamental component of inequality – “the power to name and define” (p.581).

Much of the research within NLS focuses on the experiences of individuals, groups or communities, privileging children’s voices and adopting ethnographic approaches. It is argued that this helps to provide “rich descriptions of cultures and home languages not considered mainstream” (McTavish, 2009, p.8) and that by truly listening to their voices, curricula can be created that value and recognise children’s abilities, interests and expertise (McTavish, Streelasky, & Coles, 2012). Marsh (2012) concurs with this view, recognising that children engage in a range of literacy practices out-of-school, both online and offline, and by identifying the purposes of literacy in children’s lives, educators can build upon these experiences in schools.

Research in this area uses the terms ‘literacy event’ and ‘literacy practice’ to describe the areas of focus. A ‘literacy event’ can be defined as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (Heath, 1982, p.50) with the term ‘literacy practice’ being used to focus on the “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (Street, 1984, p.1). For example, a child’s home literacy practices may include gaming and watching television whereas schooled literacy practices might include spelling tests or writing book reviews.

To further understand the value of research from an NLS perspective, I will briefly outline studies that demonstrate the benefits of ethnographic approaches when researching lived experiences, offering insights into children’s experiences with schooled and home literacies.

2.1.3.1 Ethnographic studies of literacy

In *Ways with Words* (1983), Shirley Brice Heath provides a detailed ethnographic account of three communities in south-eastern America. Heath found that children from a Black, Afro-American community learned about literacy practices in a highly contextualised manner with little or no direct instruction from adults. However, when they began school, learning to read was presented as a linear, skills-based procedure that was incongruent with their previous learning and, in this environment, they found learning difficult. What Heath found interesting was that when the teacher approached literacy in ways that were more aligned with literacy practices in the home, they made good progress. It could be argued, then, that strict adherence to schooled approaches to the teaching of reading may limit the potential of some children and fail to value some of the literacy experiences that occur outside of school. In a follow-up to *Ways with Words*, Heath's *Words as Work and Play* (2012) traced some of the people involved in the original research. In her conclusions, she suggests that when the learning that occurs in everyday contexts has a "high degree of compatibility with that of direct instruction, greater comfort and satisfaction in learning generally result" (p172).

Using linguistic ethnography to investigate how adolescents construct knowledge and identity in 'talk' away from the formal classroom setting, Maybin (2007a) used interviews, note taking and individual recordings of children's conversations to develop a thoughtful interpretation of their interactions. Her study highlights the relevance of narrative in structuring children's experiences and how this allows for exploration and experimentation. Sperling and Appleman (2011), commenting on Maybin's study, suggested that the children were able to "try on various identities" and "explore the issues that they deal with in their everyday lives" (p.76).

Papen (2016) conducted an ethnographic study with Year 1 children looking at teaching and learning in literacy in school. She examined the role of government policy in the classroom. She found that teachers viewed structured approaches to teaching reading (for example, phonics) quite positively and believed that they were successful in terms of teaching children to read. However, she found that these sessions were embedded within a culture of reading which valued a range of other literacy activities, for example, stories, songs, prayers, computer games and Christmas cards. An ethnographic study allowed Papen to appreciate the holistic approach to teaching reading. Papen argues that it is the "balance and variety of activities" (p.170) which is important and that new learning and experiences should build on what children already know and can do.

Studies that have compared and contrasted 'home' and 'school' literacies have found 'schooled' literacy to be narrow and test-focused; it appears to pay little attention to children's wider uses of literacy, often invalidating the voices of some groups of children (Knobel, 2001). McTavish and McTavish et al. (2009; 2012) compared the in-school and out-of-school literacy practices of minority children whilst Marsh (2012) investigated the literacy purposes involved in out-of-school virtual world gaming. The children in each of the studies displayed a high level of interest and enthusiasm when involved in out-of-school activities; one 8-year-old boy literally "bubbled over" when conversing with his family about their shared interests such as football and the internet (McTavish, 2009, p.22) and virtual worlds offered 7-year-olds a version of literacy that they found 'exciting' with 'interesting' types of reading (Marsh, 2012).

The implications of these studies are that more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the ways in which children use literacy out-of-school can provide information to help classroom practitioners develop closer links with this and in-

school literacy. It would appear that when children are engaged in these activities, they demonstrate the ability to use skills and knowledge to create new texts and literacies. McTavish (2009) suggests that classroom practices and curricula should reflect this, constructing “authentic spaces for learning that will allow children to participate in a global communication and information economy” (p. 24). However, Leander and Boldt (2013) suggest that this view is overly simplistic and does not take into account the unexpectedness or spontaneity of such events. They argue that if students’ interests are built upon in the curriculum “something key is lost” pointing out that schooled versions of, for example, ‘Manga’ – a Japanese graphic novel – would not match the “raucous” and “playful” version of Manga perhaps experienced out-of-school, leaving children feeling “disappointed” (p. 43). McTavish (2009) acknowledges this emphasising that, rather than adapting out-of-school literacies to fit into existing school curricula, teachers should reflect critically on “how their students’ literacies travel across time and context and provide ‘spaces’ for students so they can make meaningful connections across spaces” (p.24). This “recontextualisation” encourages children to “re-explore” their own interests rather than disengage (Bulfin & Koutsogiannis, 2012, p.344). The key to understanding this complexity may lie in furthering teachers’ understanding and interpretations of children’s out-of-school literacies.

Studies examining children’s home and school literacies have often featured digital technologies. Children enter school already equipped with information and communications technology (ICT) skills and competencies (O'Hara, 2011) with most children aged 2 years already using laptops or tablets. Where tablets are available in the home, approximately a third of children aged under 5 own their own device (Marsh et al., 2015). Merchant (2021) suggests that the expansion and diversification

of literacy since the beginning of the twenty-first century means that digital literacy is now part of what it means to be literate – it is the “new normal” (p.97). There appears to be less emphasis on paper-based texts (Brandt, 2015) and although people appear to be reading more, this may have altered from the individual and sustained approach that we have associated with a reader in the past (Liu, 2005). The use of new technologies begins at an early age and it has been argued that these should now be incorporated into family literacy projects (Marsh, Hannon, Lewis, & Ritchie, 2015).

These new forms of literacy associated with digital practices such as online gaming, social networking, email and use of the Internet, are multimodal involving music, visual image, sound animation and printed text (McTavish, 2009). If children are to be given the opportunity to lead purposeful lives, they will need to be competent in much more than the skills and knowledge needed to pass tests (Yelland, 2008). A curriculum that focuses simply on print-based literacies might be considered to lack relevance when we consider the complexities of children’s everyday lives (Burnett & Merchant, 2018a). Metcalfe, Simpson, Todd, & Toyn (2013) suggest that children should be taught how to engage with online text and critically evaluate the content. McTavish et al. (2012) believe that to be fully equipped to meet the demands of the 21st century it will be useful to combine new literacies with more traditional print-based literacy. As Brown suggests, when individuals are required to construct meaning it is important to be able to read a range of modes (2016).

Studies such as these contribute to the New Literacy Studies’ view of literacy as a social practice; they aim to examine the literacy practices that people engage in and the different contexts in which they occur, rather than a ‘deficit’ view of literacy whereby children are viewed as ‘illiterate’ or ‘deprived’ (Street, 2012b). They

encourage us to reflect on our everyday practices rather than making assumptions about what literacy is (Hamilton, 1999). By using an ethnographic approach, researchers are able to study literacy as a social practice, recognising the value of a wider view of literacy.

The view of literacy as a social practice underpins this study. By examining children's perceptions and experiences of reading in context, I hoped to develop an understanding of how they developed their reading identities in the current climate of high-stakes testing. Research from alternative perspectives is also included at relevant points as I highlight influences relating to policy and classroom practice.

In the next and final section on literacy and reading, I will explore the research relating to reading for pleasure, considering the range of benefits it can offer and its relationship with identity.

2.1.4 Reading for pleasure

'Reading for pleasure' is a term that has been used to describe an act of reading that involves "the reader's volition, their agency and desire to read" (Cremin, T., Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2014, p.5). Research suggests that engagement in reading can lead to improved outcomes (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Smith, Jeffrey K., Smith, Gilmore, & Jameson, 2012) illustrated by increases in vocabulary and better comprehension (Andreassen & Bråten, 2010; Krashen, 2004; Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012). Drawing on an extensive review of available research, The Reading Agency concluded that reading for pleasure leads to "enjoyment, relaxation and escapism, increasing understanding of self and social identities, empathy, knowledge of other cultures, relatedness, community cohesion and increasing social capital" (The Reading Agency, 2015, p.4).

It has been argued that children who are intrinsically motivated to read and enjoy reading, read more and, as a result, improve their reading skills (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; OECD, 2010). Intrinsic motivation has been positively associated with 'flow' (Thissen, Menninghaus, & Schlotz, 2018). 'Flow', according to Csikszentmihalyi (2008), is the process whereby an actor and action 'become one'. He suggests that 'flow' is "intrinsically rewarding" and can affect children's attitudes to reading and have a motivational effect (p.127). Csikszentmihalyi believes that 'flow' can be achieved when there is a balance between the level of challenge and required skill with challenge including the cultural and social conditions involved which may attract children to a particular event. The activities and strategies used in schools can affect a child's motivation to read.

It has been highlighted that children display greater enthusiasm when reading books of their own choosing (Arizpe, Farrell, & McAdam, 2013) which could be a concern if schools promote reading for pleasure with school-sanctioned texts (Cremin, T., Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Drury, 2012). As Parry and Taylor (2018) point out, if children are not given genuine choice in reading material, divisions may occur between 'schooled' reading and reading that happens at home and in communities. To support children in their development as readers, feeling part of a reading community can affect children's choice of text, amount of reading and have an impact on their motivation, engagement and persistence (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Parry and Taylor (2018) suggest that schools should provide time and space for the development of these areas and Levy (2011) believes that teachers should include approaches that recognise and value children's home reading preferences and practices. Teachers who are knowledgeable about children's texts can support children's reading development with advice regarding reading material based on

their interests (Cremin, T. et al., 2014). This would appear particularly supportive as reading literature has been associated with a range of benefits.

Studies based on participants reading literature suggest that it can support well-being by promoting social activity and helping to develop connections between people, thereby alleviating symptoms of loneliness and depression (Billington, 2011; Billington, Carroll, Davis, Healey, & Kinderman, 2013; Gualano et al., 2017). Additionally, researchers also argue that reading literary fiction can help to develop empathy, encouraging readers to consider their own lives in relation to others (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Oatley, Keith, 2011). However, such findings are often based on adult studies and research with children appears to be more limited. Clark and Picton (2018) explored children's mental health in a survey of over 40,000 children and young people aged 8-18 years and reported that those participants who owned more books reported better mental health. Although these findings are positive, it is important to recognise that respondents self-reported their mental health on a scale of 1 to 10 which may be somewhat questionable. Additionally, ownership of books may reflect a range of factors other than simply implying that participants read more literature.

Many of the studies exploring social and emotional well-being focus on book-based literature which supports the concern that 'reading for pleasure' is interpreted by traditionalists as children reading in isolation and entering "imagined worlds through curling up with classic works" (Burnett & Merchant, 2018b, p.62). Indeed, reading for pleasure has been used interchangeably with terms such as 'volitional reading' and 'sustained silent reading' (Collins, Dargan, Walsh, & Merga, 2022) perhaps conjuring up notions of prolonged individual engagement with physical texts. However, rather than being an isolated event, Cremin, T. et al. (2014) argue that reading is

essentially social in nature. Readers are able to make interpersonal, intrapersonal and intertextual links as they read (Smith, V., 2005) which can be discussed with peers and family members. Furthermore, Burnett and Merchant (2018b) suggest that the term should be more inclusive and include ephemeral and digital encounters as these also involve reading and are pleasurable activities. The value of digital texts is recognised by the OECD where a successful reading curriculum is described as one that:

> …fully integrates reading in a traditional sense together with the new forms of reading that have emerged over the past decades and that continue to emerge due to the spread of digital devices and digital texts (OECD, 2019, p.24)

This wider view of reading and reading behaviour seems to recognise the value of reading beyond the skills needed to decode and also incorporates digital texts to reflect the changing nature of reading in our everyday lives.

In summary, it would appear that there are many benefits of reading for pleasure, both academic and non-academic, although how these are achieved may be open to interpretation. Government policies (DfE, 2012b; DfE, 2021) often highlight the cognitive benefits of reading for pleasure (OECD, 2002; OECD, 2010), pointing to better attainment in literacy and numeracy (Sullivan & Brown, 2015) and the link to reading enjoyment and reading behaviour (Clark, C. & De Zoysa, 2011). For teachers tasked with developing children as readers, decisions relating to the type of text, agency and choice of activity would seem important. As Oatley (2003) suggests, reading for pleasure can impact “the building … of minds and identities” (p.73). It is important to recognise that identities cannot be *imposed* on individuals; children should be provided with the necessary resources, time and space along with

guidance and advice from knowledgeable others to these identities to develop (Ellis & Smith, 2017).

In the next section, I will consider identities and reading identities in more depth, looking at how these might develop, are recognised and maintained. I begin with a focus on identity.

2.2 Identity/ies

Identity has been conceptualised in many different ways. From a psychological view, identity has been considered as something that might develop in stages (Erikson, 1968). This can, as McCarthey and Moje (2002) point out, suggest a somewhat 'fixed' view of identity that might lead educators to label pupils as, for example, motivated, lazy, etc., and can lead to the possibility of an educator's role in educational failure being dismissed. In this study, however, I adopt a postmodernist understanding where identities are considered to be numerous and are viewed as evolving and complex. Rather than a coherent self, identities can be understood as multiple, partial and changeable (Yon, 2000). Identity viewed from this perspective points to multiple identities that alter in relation to different contexts (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner, & Cain, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009) and are often contradictory (Sarup, 1998).

2.2.1 Social identities

In this thesis identity - or identities - are recognised as social. This view assumes that identities are a matter of process (Atkinson, 2017); they are created and sustained through encounters and interactions with others and are moulded by institutional and relational processes. Gee (2000) suggests that an individual's identity relates to the 'kind of person' someone is; this may differ depending upon the

context so we can be several ‘kinds’ of person depending on the situation. Identities can be considered as changeable and dependent upon context which suggests an element of fluidity; an identity can alter from moment to moment, influenced by others’ perceptions and our perceptions of ourselves (McCarthey, 2001). Social actors may choose to make aspects of their identities visible to themselves and others through enactments or performances and attributed identities may be accepted or challenged. The importance of relationships is highlighted where identities are recognised by others (Gee, 2000); identities are brought into existence when acknowledged by others in a social situation.

Moje and Luke (2009) suggest a range of metaphors when considering identity construction: identity as difference, sense of self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative and position. Through their discussion, they highlight the role that literacy plays in the development and representation of identity pointing to the move to a social view of literacy rather than one that focuses on literacy as a skill (Street, 1984). This social turn (Gee, 1986) has resulted in theorists acknowledging that identities both mediate and are mediated by the range of texts individuals engage with (McCarthey, 2001; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). I will briefly outline the metaphors of difference, self and mind before discussing narrative and position (which are relevant to this study) in more depth.

Moje and Luke (2009) describe ‘identity as difference’ as understanding how individuals can be distinguished from one another, for example, by class, race, etc. They suggest that studies using this approach tend to focus on groups rather than individuals, for example, gender, etc. ‘Identity as self’ recognises the development of an individual and, although acknowledging the social elements of identity formation, often understands identity as a goal-oriented development to a consistent and stable

self. Closely linked to this understanding is ‘identity as mind or consciousness’. Here identity is recognised as the development of the individual’s mind or consciousness in response to new experiences; identity develops along a linear path as individuals engage, respond and adapt to new situations.

Identity as narrative suggests that the stories individuals tell offer opportunities for identity construction and also provide representations of those identities. Central to these studies are the roles of oral and written language. McCarthey and Moje (2002) suggest that the narrative is like a ‘gel’ that holds the experiences together to form some kind of identity. Mishler (2004) highlights the changeable nature of narratives suggesting that different questions from an interviewer may lead an interviewee offering differing interpretations of the same event. This is not to say that there are true and false accounts or selves, more that a person might have different interpretations of the same event depending upon the context. Anzaldua’s “identity-as-clusters-of-stories” metaphor (as cited in McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p.231) suggests that identity construction involves stories others tell about us and stories we tell about ourselves. McCarthey and Moje (2002) expand on this metaphor and suggest that, when exploring identities, it is perhaps more relevant to consider the stories that are performed or enacted rather than simply ‘told’; such an approach recognises the lived and relational aspect of identities as opposed to the fixed nature of a story that is simply narrated. It would seem useful to acknowledge that identities are not only represented and constructed through narrative but also to acknowledge that individuals ‘do identity’ as part of their engagements with everyday activities (Moje, 2004; Wenger, 1998). When identities are understood as socially produced, positioning is a consideration (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Holland & Leander, 2004; McVee, Brock, & Glazier, 2011). How individuals are positioned both through

and by narratives and their engagement in everyday life is also relevant to identity construction.

‘Identity as position’ is defined by Davies and Harre (1990a) as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines” (p. 48). Holland and Leander (2004) suggest that positioning involves socially producing particular individuals and groups as ‘culturally imagined types’ where others (and also the individual) treat someone as a particular type of person. Frankel and Fields (2019) suggest that it is important to consider how individuals position themselves in relation to the activities and through their relationships with others.

Identity as position recognises the role of discourse, texts and other media in the production of individual and group identities and also acknowledges power relations as part of the process. For example, a pupil might be offered the position of ‘gifted pupil’ when a teacher moves them to a ‘top ability’ group. Such identities can be accepted completely or partially, or could be rejected (Davies & Harré, 1990a; Foucault, 1977). Research in this area explores how identities are produced in and through engagement in activities and also pays attention to the positions individuals or groups are allocated or offered through time, space and interactions. Consideration is given to the extent to which these positions are taken up or resisted (Davies & Harré, 1990b; Davies, 2008).

When considering identity-as-position, Asher and Zacher (2019) suggest that this is “the negotiated process of accepting or challenging positionings that engender recognitions or misrecognitions, a process driven by a person’s desire to be viewed/positioned in particular ways” (p.212). This view encourages us to consider

the effects of positioning on how individuals wish to be perceived and their options for exercising agency (Davies & Harré, 1990a). It is, therefore, important to consider how children are positioned in relation to the reading practices used in school as these will undoubtedly influence their developing reading identities.

When considering how identities are constructed and challenged, it is useful to look at how individuals enact their identities with one another and the extent to which these identities are supported or constrained. Atkinson (2017) suggests that there are a number of areas of interest. To understand how individual identities are produced, sustained, challenged or validated, he believes it is important for researchers to examine the processes involved. Atkinson suggests that identities can be impacted and transformed in a number of ways such as through everyday ceremonial events (Williams, R., 2000), labelling and turning points. Status passage (Glaser & Strauss, 2011) is one type of ceremonial event that refers to the transition a person makes to a new social position.

Status passage, according to Glaser and Strauss (2011), is the marking of an event that signals transitions made by individuals or groups. An example might be when cohorts of children move from one year group to another. Status passages are usually based on shared cultural agreements; where a status passage is individual, there will be some element of recognition from others. Such occurrences mark important transitions in a person's biography and can often involve official, ceremonial procedures (although this is not always the case). An example might be when a child achieves a particular level in reading or moves to the next 'book band'. Related to status passages are turning points (Atkinson, 2017).

Turning points (Atkinson, 2017) provide markers in an individual's biography; they provide insights into how an identity has developed. Turning points can be thought of as important events in an individual's life which can be reflected on retrospectively or prospectively. For example, a child may discuss a particular book recommended by a friend that encouraged them to read a new genre. It is up to the social actor themselves to define what counts as a turning point reinforcing the understanding of such events as social and situated. Atikinson argues that it is important to note that it is not the event in itself that might lead to the change or transformation, rather it is the meaning attributed to the event by the individual.

Status passages and turning points link to the use of labelling; labels can be assigned as individuals move to new positions such as 'Year 4' or 'level 4 reader'. Labels can have both positive and negative consequences. Labelling individuals can "confirm and amplify" an individual's attributes and become self-justifying (Atkinson, 2017, p.89). Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) examined the labelling of high-school students in the US; the allocation of the label 'academic' or 'vocational' based on an individual's abilities had far-reaching consequences for students' trajectories both at school and beyond. These labels were, as Atkinson (2017) points out, "confirmed and amplified over time in a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p.89).

In this study, I draw on ideas of identities as changeable, socially constructed, mediated and dynamic and suggest that identity as narrative and identity as position offer useful metaphors which allow consideration of 'what' identity is and which 'processes' are involved. Such a view recognises that reading identities are, therefore, context-dependent and related to power (Moje & Luke, 2009). I will now explore research relating to the development of children's reading identities in school

and consider how approaches to teaching and assessing reading might position children.

2.2.2 Reading identities

School-based reading activities offer opportunities for children to develop their reading identities and it would seem important to consider how children are positioned by these activities, by themselves, by others and by the apparatus of schooling, for example, classrooms, reading materials, timetables etc. The use of regular testing might position pupils in relation to the skills associated with traditional schooled reading rather than the depth and breadth of pupils' reading practices; children might be labelled as a 'good' or 'bad' reader in relation to outcomes. At the end of Key Stage 2, children in Year 6 are required to complete a reading test as part of the SATs. The results for the school (not individuals) are published in league tables identifying the number of pupils who are:

- working towards age-related expectation
- meeting age-related expectation (ARE)
- working at greater depth (GD)

ARE and GD children are classed as achieving the expected standard. However, as the published classification system also provides details regarding the percentage of children achieving GD, Bradbury, Braun and Quick (2021) suggest that the levels actually represent "failing/acceptable/successful" (p. 159). This approach links to the view of identity as a linear development (O'Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2009) which is goal-oriented, leading to a stable and consistent self (Moje & Luke, 2009).

Positioning children in relation to reading ability seems to influence how children perceive themselves and others, reinforcing an understanding of reading as a sign of

intelligence (Scherer, 2016). When considering what it means to be a ‘good’ reader in school, children might be positioned positively in terms of their good decoding and comprehension skills (as judged in standardised tests). If they are successful in the reading tasks presented in school it would seem reasonable to assume that they are more likely to feel positively about themselves as readers. However, for those who are not successful, the consequences are likely to be less positive.

Scherer (2016) conducted a year-long qualitative study using ethnographic methods to explore children, reading and identity in a school setting in England. Using participatory methods, she held interviews with children aged 6 to 11 years using picture books and school reading books as “trigger materials” (Troyna & Carrington, 1990, p.9). The pupils involved were all thought of as ‘struggling’ readers in relation to national standards. She examined the children’s understandings of reading in school and found that they were acutely aware of their position as a reader in relation to other pupils in the class. In her discussions with the children, she learned that they had a clear understanding of the ‘classroom hierarchies’ in place in relation to reading. They reproduced the values of the teacher and school policies using stratifications such as ‘banded’ reading books and ‘ability’ groupings to describe their positions as ‘good’ or ‘poor’ readers. Older readers who ‘struggled’ described better readers as ‘intelligent’ whereas they thought of themselves as not ‘clever’ or ‘knowing’.

The 10- and 11-year-olds in the study, who were positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, recognised the implications of the judgements made about their reading ability. To preserve their sense of self, they attempted to resist their positioning. For example, some children avoided activities that might confirm their identity as a poor reader such as reading aloud; a practice that left them open to the judgement of

others. ‘Consoling narratives’ (Yardley, 2008) were used with limited success by some children in an attempt to distance themselves from the negative associations of being a ‘poor’ reader; they identified aspects of school that they were “really, really” good at to try and separate “reading from the slippery concept of intelligence” (Scherer, 2016, p.404). Their sense of failure as ‘poor’ readers became, what Scherer describes as ‘sedimented’; by the time they reach Year 6 this identity is entrenched. Resistance and avoidance strategies were used to avoid the “emotional pain” (Geldard & Geldard, 1997, p.71) associated with being a poor reader but, Scherer suggests, with limited success.

When children are labelled as ‘poor’ readers in school, Alvermann (2001) argues that that their identity is being ‘chosen’ for them. This may lead to children accepting positions attributed by teachers who are in positions of power and developing an understanding of themselves as someone who finds reading difficult. Children positioned at the lower end of the reading hierarchy might perceive certain tasks to be beyond their capabilities and use a range of strategies in their attempts to avoid the negative associations of being a ‘poor’ reader, perhaps leading to labels such as ‘reluctant’ or ‘struggling’. However, such children may well be positioned as ‘successful’ in reading practices that do not focus on a limited notion of what counts as ‘ability’.

When we consider literacy as a social practice rather than the ability to acquire a set of skills, we recognise literacy as situated (Gee, 2001); learning to read involves a range of actors engaging together in different situations and provides opportunities to construct a range of identities. Triplett (2004) found that an 11-year-old ‘struggling’ reader reported feeling anxious about tests, upset that he did not win prizes awarded for successful reading and concern regarding his level of reading as identified by a

colour band. However, during tutor sessions where he experienced choice in materials, reading within his instructional level and activities of personal interest, the same child expressed enjoyment and pride in his learning. Triplett describes these emotions as “context-specific” and “relationship-specific” (p. 221). Anger and frustration, she suggests, are expressed when a child believes that someone else is responsible for their lack of success. As McCarthey and Moje (2002) point out, “identities are always situated in relationships, and … power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned on the basis of those identities” (p. 231). Children’s engagement with texts, therefore, might not always depend on their ‘ability’; their understanding of what it is to be a reader and their self-perception are also important (Hall, L, A., 2016).

The study of identity from a sociocultural perspective encourages labels to be critiqued and takes account of differing circumstances in the development of identities; both the language used by the individual and the language used to describe them are key factors (Janks, 2010). Literacy practices can constrain and limit identities as well as provide opportunities for individuals to try on new identities (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). The expectations teachers have about children and the tasks they assign might depend on assumptions about a child’s identity.

It might be useful to think of successful readers as those who have the belief in their ability to understand texts, the value they attach to reading and their knowledge of how readers behave in particular contexts (Hall, L, A., Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham, & Mosley, 2010). This view encourages us to consider a successful reader as having more than just the ability to comprehend texts; their self-belief that they are able to understand a text is important too. However, the potential of reading practices and activities to support children’s developing reading identities does not appear to have

been a focus of government policy in England. In the next section, I will consider the impact of various policies and approaches on how reading has been taught in England.

2.3 Reading policy in England

2.3.1 National Curriculum and statutory testing

Prior to the introduction of the *National Curriculum* (NC) in 1988, decisions relating to how reading was taught in schools were made by schools themselves with minimal monitoring of outcomes (Fisher, T., 2008). The Education Act in 1988 (DfEE) marked the beginning of an era of intense government control over what happens in schools, with literacy arguably taking centre stage as governments addressed the reported literacy crisis. The interest in standards of children's reading and their perceived decline seems to have been triggered by a report from educational psychologists. They claimed that standards had fallen in the period since 1985 (Education, Science and Arts Committee, 1991) and Turner's report (1990) (Sponsored Reading Failure. An object report) also appears to have been influential, suggesting that whole language/real book methods were the issue.

In response to the reported crises, policymakers began to consider literacy learning in schools in terms of what it could contribute to the economy (Harper, 2015; Moss, 2014; Soler & Openshaw, 2007). As Moss (2017) points out, the wide-ranging and multifaceted skill set literacy can offer is recognised as the "main commodity of exchange that schools create". Furthermore, she suggests that this narrow view of what literacy can offer has led governments to introduce a range of literacy reforms that focus primarily on outcomes rather than providing a purposeful and engaging literacy curriculum. The link between economic needs and education seems to have driven governments to focus on the skills required for engagement in the "global

knowledge economy" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.197). Moss (2012) argues that, in relation to literacy, policymakers claim to view success in literacy in terms of efficacy, equity of outcomes and levels of skill where system change is achieved through prescribed curriculum content and regular testing.

Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs) of reading in primary schools in England were introduced for Year 2 children (end of Key Stage 1) in 1990 with tests for pupils in Year 6 beginning a few years later. Such tests indicated percentages of children who have achieved the required 'level'. The view implicit within SATs is that literacy is a "mental capacity and possession" (Hall, Kathy, 2007, p.89) which is quantifiable, with each child being given a numerical score (now termed 'age-expected' outcomes). Outcomes for reading at Key Stage 2 allow for comparisons between schools and can be used to increase accountability and competition. Results for Key Stage 2 children are published in rank order in league tables and if schools do not achieve benchmark standards, they risk triggering an Ofsted inspection. A poor Ofsted outcome can lead to external intervention where contracts are allocated to new providers such as academy chains and free schools. SATs provide a vehicle for delivering measurable outcomes where competition is encouraged and can therefore be considered 'high-stakes' (see section 1.3). However, Moss (2017) suggests that the pressure for schools to achieve improved outcomes leads to the curriculum becoming almost redundant as schools focus on the subjects being tested which then, in effect, become the curriculum (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018).

In addition to national testing, reading in England is also judged according to its global rankings in the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Both are comparative studies: PISA is an assessment of reading, science and maths for 15-year-olds

conducted every three years and PIRLS assesses the reading performance of 10-year-olds every five years. These studies reinforce the requirement for appropriate, local testing regimes to be in place and performance internationally is viewed as of high-interest value for the public; results of PISA and PIRLS are published by mainstream media. As nations focus on their international rankings in PIRLS and PISA, they appear to be more inclined to adopt a skills-based focus in their bid to improve outcomes (Simpson & Cremin, T., 2022). However, a skills-based approach does not appear to reflect the conceptualisation of reading outlined by PISA which, in addition to "cognitive characteristics" also points to the "motivational and behavioural characteristics of reading" (OECD, 2019, p.5).

Despite concerns about the narrow focus on test outcomes, SAT results have often been used as a lever for government guidance and statutory requirements in relation to literacy and, in particular, reading (Fisher, T., 2008). The pressure to perform both locally and nationally following their introduction initially led to increased government control over how reading is taught in England's schools with a range of policies being introduced. As Fisher suggests, this move towards increased accountability was "driven by an intention to dictate to state schools what was to be taught and how it was to be assessed in an attempt to control from the centre" (p.258). One of the most significant policy initiatives was the *National Literacy Strategy*.

2.3.2 National Literacy Strategy

The Labour Party, elected in 1997, introduced the *National Literacy Strategy* (NatLS) (DfEE, 1998), reinforcing the control that the government had over what happened in schools (Street, Lefstein, & Pahl, 2007). Stannard and Huxford (2007) claimed that the aim was to ensure that good practice in schools was shared. The NatLS helped to ensure that literacy teaching became much more uniform as, although non-

statutory, Ofsted inspections focused on aspects within the strategy leaving schools with little option other than to follow the guidance provided (Papen, 2016). Inspection outcomes are open to public scrutiny with parents and carers using them to make decisions about their child's school and, as highlighted in section 2.3.1, an unsatisfactory Ofsted report can trigger changes in management and a school's status.

The 'what works' approach (Blunkett, 2000) highlighted the government's shift away from a perceived over-reliance on ideology or dogma relating to the use of a 'whole language' approach in schools (Moss, 2009). The NatLS (DfEE, 1998) advocated the 'searchlights' model (Stannard & Huxford, 2007) for teaching reading which supported the use of cueing systems when teaching reading: syntax, context, word recognition and phonics. The implication was that children should make use of all four of the cueing systems with each aspect given equal value in the reading process. However, as the NatLS policy cycle evolved, the international study PIRLS reported a decline in the number of children in England who stated that they read for pleasure (Twist, Sainsbury, Woodthorpe, & Whetton, 2003; Twist, Schagen, & Hodgson, 2007).

2.3.2.1 NatLS and reading for pleasure

Considering the many benefits of reading for pleasure (as outlined in section 2.1.4) the declining numbers of children choosing to read for fun following the introduction of the NatLS was clearly a concern (Twist et al., 2003; Twist et al., 2007). Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) found that enjoyment of reading for 8 to 11-year-olds had fallen significantly during the first five years of the NatLS and suggested that, although recognising that there was no causal link, the decline may be linked to the children's experiences of the strategy.

One possible reason for the decline may have been related to the increased use of text extracts rather than whole novels in the teaching of reading. In a small-scale study, Fisher (2004) found that teachers expressed concerns that pupils no longer had the opportunity to read complete texts and had little time to reflect on their reading. Teachers also reported a lack of reading for pleasure in the literacy hour, where the completion of a novel was rare (Smith, Fay & Hardman, 2000).

Also influential in relation to reading for pleasure is reading aloud or 'story time'. Prior to the introduction of the NatLS, reading aloud had been viewed as a positive and worthwhile activity. The Kingman report assumed that children were "sharing and listening to readings" (DfES, 1988, p.14) and Cox (DfES, 1989) recommended that teachers should "continue the practice of reading aloud in class" as "there is plenty of evidence that this simple activity can interest and enthuse. It is a valuable means of conveying the pleasure of reading" (16:6). However, reading aloud did not feature in the NatLS.

A report from Ofsted (HMI, 1996) pointed to a trend in reading aloud which it appeared to view as less than satisfactory:

> In some schools, these sessions appeared to be treated more as an end-of-day relaxation than as opportunities for whole-class teaching and discussion (p. 25).

Graham (1998) suggested that reading aloud was not considered worthwhile as the NatLS focused on direct teaching; where the purpose of listening to a story was assumed to be relaxation it was difficult to justify. This is perhaps one of the reasons for its decline; where teachers experience pressure to deliver a wide curriculum within a limited time frame, reading aloud may be considered an optional luxury.

When considering the decline in children reading for pleasure, the practices adopted by schools may have negatively impacted children's enjoyment of reading and their perceptions of themselves as readers (Levy, 2009a). The impact of the NatLS on test outcomes was also questionable.

2.3.2.2 NatLS and test outcomes

Following the introduction of the NatLS, outcomes in SATs for reading appeared to improve - 67% of children achieved level 4 in Key Stage 2 SATs in 1997 compared to 83% in 2000 (Massey, Green, Dexter, & Hamnett, 2003). However, research suggests that teachers became more likely to teach the skills related to the tests (Tymms, 2004), SATs paper became more 'user friendly' (Massey et al., 2003) and also easier (Hall, Kathy, 2002).

SATs also appeared to have a negative effect on those children who might be considered 'low-attaining'. Harlen and Deaking Crick (2002) found that the introduction of SATs in England appeared to correlate with low achievement and low self-esteem. Those who were thought of as 'successful' seemed motivated to work even harder leaving those who 'struggle' to "give up in the face of what they believe to be unattainable achievement standards" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p.13).

By 2004 the government target of 80% of children achieving level 4 in SATs was achieved in reading however writing levels did not realise the same levels of success. Politicians, recognising the challenge of successfully managing centralised policy initiatives, appeared to distance themselves from uncertain outcomes. As SAT results at Key Stage 2 in literacy plateaued, the labour government, who had once embraced the NatLS, began to shift the responsibility for the policy's success to the private sector. Moss (2017) describes this approach as "high autonomy and high

accountability” (p.62) where schools remain under pressure to achieve benchmark outcomes without specific guidance from the government regarding best practice. It might be argued that this level of autonomy was helpful in terms of schools selecting methods and approaches most suited to their children. However, the more probable reality is that, in the absence of Local Education Authorities, schools looked to use a range of external suppliers without any evidence that such services were able to achieve better outcomes for their pupils.

Although the government seemed to withdraw to a more peripheral position in terms of literacy policy and guidance provided for schools, the focus on improving reading standards continued to be central. Phonics, and in particular systematic synthetic phonics (SSP), became the next key focus as the government looked to review the teaching of early reading and introduce a new *National Curriculum* for England.

2.3.3 Systematic synthetic phonics

As the NatLS faded in popularity, politicians and lobby groups aligned to support a focus on the use of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) as the primary approach to teaching early reading (Moss & Huxford, 2007).

Following the recommendations of the Rose Review (2006), the NatLS was modified and renamed the Primary National Strategy (PNS) and the government stated that phonics should be taught discretely (DfES, 2006). Additionally, the review advocated for the SVoR rather than the searchlights model. It highlighted research by cognitive psychologists who recommended the separation of the two components of word reading and comprehension when teaching reading, which, they suggested, would lead to a better understanding of each.

Despite concerns, (Dombey, 2010; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Pearson & Hiebert, 2010) SSP emerged as the exclusive form of reading instruction. Children's knowledge of SSP was tested using the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) introduced in 2012 and the teaching of SSP became a statutory requirement in 2013 (DfE, 2013).

It was claimed that the purpose of the screening check was to "confirm that all children have learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard" (DfE, 2012a, p.4) and it was described as a 'light touch' check (DfE, 2015). However, the results of the test are used by Ofsted as part of the school inspection process so it can be interpreted as a 'high-stakes' assessment leading to phonics becoming a priority for teachers in Key Stage 1 and early years classrooms (Bradbury, 2018). SSP continues to feature prominently in the latest government guidance for reading. *The Reading Framework* (DfE, 2021) - a 115-page document that outlines expectations regarding early reading for schools, Initial Teaching Training partnerships (ITT), Early Careers Teachers (ECTs) and Ofsted – claims that the evidence for the use of SSP is "indisputable" (p.4); the use of any other research examining early reading is discouraged. Additionally, children are encouraged to read from decodable books in an approach that presents reading as a somewhat linear path:

> …schools should invest in books that have been carefully structured in cumulative steps for children learning to read, so that they can decode every word as their knowledge of the alphabetic code increases. These books are often referred to simply as 'decodable' books. (DfE, 2021, p.46)

Although the claims regarding the use of SSP are questionable (Ellis & Moss, 2014), it is logical to assume that teachers will adopt the recommended strategies and 'teach to the test' as they aim to improve outcomes in high-stakes tests (Mansell, 2007).

This may have led to the use of approaches that negatively impact children's understanding of reading and themselves as readers. Discussing the use of ability grouping (Bradbury et al., 2021) teachers acknowledged that schemes such as Read Write Inc.[5] became their frame of reference when assessing a child's ability not only in phonics but also more widely. They highlighted the possible consequences for children suggesting that those who were in the "bottom set" got "into a psyche of failure" and had a "ceiling" put on their learning with a risk of being "written off" (pp. 153-154). The focus on test preparation appeared to drive teachers to make decisions about teaching pedagogy that conflicted with their views about what is best for the children; "they simply 'sigh' and carry on, or see it 'as just one of those things'" (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018, pp.59-60). Additionally, the inclusion of 'pseudowords' in the PSC has led teachers to focus specifically on teaching 'non-words' as part of their approach to reading (Walker, Sainsbury, Worth, Bamforth, & Betts, 2015). The isolation of phonics as distinct from reading can impact children's understanding of the nature of reading (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022) and their inclusion within the test has been questioned (Gibson & England, 2016).

Having outlined the national policy context for this study, I will now consider a range of activities and strategies that are commonly used to support the teaching and learning of reading in primary schools in England. These activities and strategies are particularly relevant to this study as they relate directly to the topics discussed by the children in the interviews and those observed in the classroom. An understanding of the relevant research will help to contextualise the findings.

[5] Schemes such as Ruth Miskin's Read Write Inc. (Miskin, 2011), which is validated by the DfE (January 2022), are aimed at primary children from reception onwards and promote ability grouping based on a child's phonics 'phase'. This use of 'phase' refers to the Letters and Sounds document produced by the government (DfES, 2007). However, the government guidance does not specifically state that children should be grouped by ability based on an assessment of their phase level.

2.4 Reading in practice

In this section, I will explore research relating to a range of reading activities and strategies commonly used in primary schools and which, as I go on to explore in Chapter 5, were key features of the reading provision in Amber class. I consider the implications these may have for how children understand reading, their developing reading identities and the implications for reading for pleasure. These are:

Reading Strategies:

- Levelled texts
- Guided reading

Reading Activities:

- Reading aloud
- Independent reading

I will begin by exploring levelled and guided reading; both common strategies used to support decoding and comprehension.

2.4.1 Reading strategies

In response to government policy, a range of reading activities and strategies have been used over the last twenty years. How these strategies are interpreted in classrooms has implications for how children learn to read and their understanding of reading.

2.4.1.1 Levelled texts

The use of book levels is common in English schools to support reading development (Solity & Vousden, 2009). The process of levelling texts has a long history with the use of readability formulas being introduced in the 1920s (Hiebert,

2007) and it is interesting to note that this approach occurred at a similar time to the introduction of standardised testing (Fry, 2002).

Levelling texts (also referred to as book banding, reading schemes and staged reading) is built on the premise that texts matched to a child's reading proficiency support progress and confidence levels. As Clay (1991) suggests, "[M]any children learning to read will be confused without assistance from some form of a gradient of difficulty in reading books" (p.201). The view of reading implicit in such an approach is that written English is too complex for a beginning reader.

To enable children to practise the skill of decoding, the difficulty level of a text is identified and books are allocated to certain levels (Glasswell & Ford, 2011) using approaches such as "language predictability, text formatting, and content" (Brabham & Villaume, 2002, p.438). These texts can include specialised books with controlled vocabulary and simplified grammatical structures known as 'scheme' books (Luke, Alan, Carrington, & Kapitzke, 2013) as well as authentic texts (see section 1.2). Once books have been levelled, they are colour coded (banded/staged) and allocated to various stages or levels and children are then matched to a particular level (Calkins, 2001). (For a more detailed discussion, see Fry (2002))

Levy (2009b), exploring children's views and behaviour in a school in England, found that children aged 3-5 years believed it was important to read books from the correct stage of the reading scheme on the path to being able to read 'real' books; they viewed scheme books as opportunities to practise decoding skills rather than apply their wider reading skills such as interpreting images. It appeared that children were constrained by the hierarchical approach, resisting the possibility of reading books that were not part of the scheme. It would seem that the *sole* use of reading

schemes in this study limited the children's exposure to the complexities involved when reading authentic texts (Luke, Alan et al., 2013); it did little to support multimodal reading and children as young as four seem to use such approaches to help them 'define' reading (Levy, 2009a).

Kontovourki (2012) reported similar findings. In her case study, she found that 8- and 9-year-olds in a public school in the US actively positioned themselves and others in relation to their assigned book band, reproducing the discourse of traditional schooled reading. Although children's personal reading levels were classed as 'private' by the teachers, the coloured labels on the books identified a child's stage, thereby making children's levels public. Children, particularly those assigned to a higher level on the reading scheme, used this knowledge to discipline others in relation to which books they were allowed to read. Those who were subjected to this discipline attempted to resist their position as weaker readers; they "sneaked out" chapter books, labelled their own books as "boring" or made claims about being able to read at a higher level (Kontovourki, 2012, p.169). Although this was an American study, it shines a light on children's reactions to a common, schooled reading practice and highlights their resistance to the position assigned to them by teachers. Kontovourki argues that this resistance served to reinforce the schooled approach to reading as it revealed their desire to read at a higher level.

Success in approaches that present reading as a linear path is often framed in terms such as 'free' reader (Solity & Vousden, 2009). A report from Ofsted (HMI, 2004) outlined the limitations of using schemes in schools in relation to wider reading. They pointed to the likelihood of higher-attaining children achieving 'free' reader status more quickly than 'struggling' readers thereby gaining access to a wide range of books chosen according to interest. Lower-attaining pupils, however, spent longer on

the scheme and consequently had less opportunity to read books based on choice. Although the use of levelled texts assumes that more complex texts would be too difficult for 'struggling' readers, this is not necessarily the case.

Fulmer and Frijters (2011) found that students demonstrated high levels of enjoyment and persistence when reading texts that were considered 'too difficult' if these were self-selected and of high interest. Additionally, Solity and Vousden (2009) questioned the judgement of texts being considered too difficult for readers. In their analysis of 'real' (or authentic) books and 'scheme' books, they found that there was "little difference" in terms of structure and suggested that rather than limit children to scheme books, it might be better to provide children with "opportunities to practice their skills as often within real books" (p.503). The process of limiting children's choices to a narrow range of texts is perhaps an unnecessary and possibly damaging approach, negatively affecting children's identities as readers and their understanding of reading. Choice is an essential element when encouraging children to read for pleasure.

In a recent study, Reedy and De Carvalho (2021) explored the opinions of children in an English primary school in relation to reading for pleasure. Children aged 9 and 10 years believed that an important part of reading enjoyment was the option to choose their own reading materials. They suggested that teachers should consult them regarding books to use in the classroom and which books to buy. They linked the freedom to choose books with the notion of reading for pleasure: "to make us read more, I think we get to choose" explained one child (p. 140).

It would seem that the use of levelled texts and schemes presents reading as "something to be worked through" which has perhaps contributed to a decline in

attitudes (HMI, 2004, p.12). Guided reading, introduced as part of the NatLS, is another popular approach to teaching reading in schools.

2.4.1.2 Guided reading

Guided reading is a practice used in schools that is intended to develop reading comprehension and support critical literacy (Fisher, A., 2008). It was originally introduced as part of the NatLS and signalled a move away from 'listening to readers' which was criticised by Ofsted (1996) as time-consuming and inefficient, particularly for those children who could read fluently. The strategy involves children working in a group with reading material judged appropriate for their reading 'level'.

The intention of guided reading is to provide children with a guide who could support them in developing ideas and opinions in relation to a text chosen by the teacher through discussion and/or in using different strategies to read unknown words. Guided reading appears to build on what Rogoff (1990) describes as *guided participation* whereby the expert teacher, through an investigatory approach, shifts the responsibility for exploring and understanding the text to the children. As Hobsbaum, Gamble and Reedy (2006) suggest, the aim is for children to become 'active' readers by assuming control over the process (p.28).

The research relating to guided reading in England is limited and the few studies that are available tend to be small scale looking at individual guided reading sessions in primary classrooms. Researchers have often examined the use of talk (Phillips, 2013; Skidmore, Perez-Parent, & Arnfield, 2003; Swain, 2010) and pupil responses (Fisher, A., 2008; Hanke, 2014). Findings tend to suggest that, rather than be given time and space to explore their own ideas and opinions, children are often positioned passively with teachers maintaining control. Additionally, although the shift in

pedagogy was intended as a move away from children reading aloud to the teacher, this technique was still widely used as part of the guided reading session.

Fisher (2008) looked at guided reading sessions in year groups 2, 4 and 6 (ages 6 to 11 years) in primary schools in England. She found that teachers controlled the discourse by requiring answers to questions based on their own interpretation of the text. Pupils were directed to “use the information in the text to help you answer. Don’t use too much of your own ideas, ok?” (p.23). Phillips (2013), in a case study looking at questioning in guided reading with a Year 3 class, found similar levels of teacher expectation. She reported that children spent time guessing answers to what appeared to be ‘open’ questions until they arrived at the pre-determined answer already decided by the teacher. As such, questions framed as ‘open’ were effectively ‘closed’. These findings are supported by Skidmore et al. (2003) who found that guided reading sessions with Year 6 pupils positioned teachers as “someone who possesses the truth” and “instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error” (p.52). Teachers normally asked questions with pre-determined answers and, rather than encourage genuine discussion, kept tight control over who spoke and the subject matter to be discussed. They also reported that teachers did most of the talking.

In addition to the high levels of teacher control, researchers also noted that guided reading sessions were used as an opportunity to hear children read aloud. In a guided reading session with a Year 2 class, Fisher (2008) found that the teacher spent three-quarters of the session listening to the children read. The focus for guided reading, she suggests, appeared to be on developing reading accuracy and uncovering the “‘true’ meaning of the text” (p.25) rather than encouraging children to explore their own ideas.

Hanke (2014) researched children's perspectives on guided reading in two schools. Small group sessions were observed and the children, aged 4-7 years, completed drawings based on the guided reading session and discussed these with the researcher. She found that opportunities for collaboration and discussion were limited and suggested that ability grouping perhaps served to restrict pupils rather than enable them. Although the teachers and children in the study were placed in 'ability' groups, the children included friends in their drawings who were not part of their guided reading group. They reported that reading with friends was fun and supported their reading development. As Hanke (2014) suggests, if pupils recognise friends as important when learning to read, then perhaps the organisation of groups should be more flexible.

Although the research is limited, the studies do tend to highlight common themes where the approaches used to deliver guided reading sessions position children passively. This leaves little room for genuine discussion based on children's interpretations of the text - an example of *efferent* reading (Rosenblatt, 1986) - and, as Fisher (2008) points out, this inhibits their development as active and critical readers. Swain (2010) believes that a more flexible approach is needed. She researched guided reading with Year 6 children and suggested that defined learning outcomes limit opportunities for children to elaborate on their answers. The "pressure" to ensure that children achieve the intended goal of the session within the given timeframe led teachers to "prompt" children until they had grasped a particular concept (p.133). She argued that teachers should be able to engage in open-ended discussions with children to explore the 'impact' of a text rather than guide them to a predetermined outcome. This less restricted approach combined with flexible

groupings, perhaps based on friendships, might contribute to more genuine discussion and collaborative learning (Hanke, 2014; Swain, 2010).

Although guided reading historically appears to have failed to realise the potential as highlighted by Hobsbaum, Gamble and Reedy (2006), recent research points to more promising findings. Dennis and Hemmings (2019) (researcher and teacher respectively) worked together over an 8-week period to develop Hemmings' role in guided reading with his class of Year 1 children. Using videos of his teaching to support ongoing reflecting and coaching, Hemmings developed his skills in delivering guided reading sessions to become a facilitator who guided, supported and respected children as readers. Dennis reported that his guided reading sessions became more dialogic (Alexander, 2017) using purposeful talk between teacher and pupil to enhance learning and children began to develop as "responsible, autonomous readers" (p.147). The key elements identified as influential in this research related to teacher expertise along with the ability to select appropriate texts from a range of genres that children would find pleasurable. In relation to teacher expertise, Dennis noted that Hemmings' teaching of reading had developed from focusing on isolated concepts to a more holistic approach. He was able to use probing questions and learned when to step back and allow children to assume control of the process. Although the study does not include children's perceptions of the process, such an approach would appear to have the potential to support the development of children as active and critical readers who are able to make decisions and ask questions about a shared text.

2.4.2 Reading activities

In this final section, I will discuss research relating to the activities discussed by the children in this study. This will help to contextualise the findings of the study.

Additionally, it is useful to note that these activities have also been identified by Cremin, T. et al., (2014) as having the potential to support reading for pleasure. I will begin with ‘reading aloud’; a term used to discuss the practice of reading out loud from a fiction or non-fiction text. I conclude with research relating to independent reading.

2.4.2.1 Reading aloud

Reading aloud is an activity whereby the teacher shares a text with the children. This is sometimes a preliminary activity for work in other areas such as writing or can be simply for pleasure. Listening to someone read aloud can encourage the view of reading as a pleasurable activity and for those who have not yet developed adequate decoding skills, it provides access to texts which match children’s comprehension levels (Goodwin, 1995).

Research into reading aloud to children has often focused on the benefits of this activity in terms of improving skills. Reading to young children is viewed as beneficial in terms of ‘acquiring literacy’ and providing children with a ‘head start’ in life (Kalb & van Ours, 2014; Massaro, 2017). Studies with primary-aged children point to increases in vocabulary (Read, Rogojina, & Hauer-Richard, 2022; Suggate, Lenhard, Neudecker, & Schneider, 2013) and improved inference skills (Dempsey, 2020). Additionally, reading aloud appears to have a positive impact on the amount of time children spend reading silently (Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011). Research has also focused on attitude and motivation, suggesting that reading aloud has a positive effect on lifelong reading habits and reading identity (Merga, 2017) and children consider adults who read with expression and emotion as role models (Merga, 2016).

In an attempt to identify ‘best practice’ in reading aloud, researchers have looked to compare different approaches such as repeated readings, questioning techniques and the use of computer-assisted software (Swanson et al., 2011). For example, Beck and McKeown (2001) developed a method called Text Talk which encouraged teachers to use questioning techniques to improve pupils’ vocabulary and comprehension skills and Heisey and Kucan’s study (2010) highlights the effectiveness of reading aloud in improving pupils’ understanding of scientific concepts. Although these may seem somewhat utilitarian approaches to reading aloud (where it is used to teach skills and concepts) Heisey and Kucan did comment that reading aloud in this context was important, describing it as “powerful”, enabling children to “engage with ideas in texts above their reading level” (p.675).

To consider views relating to reading aloud, Ledger and Merga (2019) surveyed children aged 6 to 12 years from 21 Australian schools; they explored their perspectives on the practice and the frequency of reading aloud both at home and at school. They found that most children enjoyed listening to someone read (76%) both at home and school with words such as ‘happy’ and ‘nice’ being used to describe the experience. In addition to affective benefits, the children also highlighted cognitive benefits such as improved vocabulary and spelling. In relation to texts, ‘story books’, ‘picture books’ and ‘funny’ books were considered common with ‘funny’ books being the most popular.

Some children, however, disliked listening to someone read and reported issues such as: ‘boring’ book choices; texts they could not relate to; slow reading with interruptions from children and overuse of questioning. Additionally, when considering how often reading aloud occurred, the children suggested that this was more frequent at home than at school; about a quarter suggested that teachers read

aloud ‘often’ with over half claiming that it happened only ‘sometimes’. Reading aloud appeared to be considered as a ‘reward’ which occurred when they had finished their ‘work’ with ‘time’ highlighted as the main reason for reading aloud being limited.

In a UK study, Safford (2014) also found that teachers struggled to find time for reading aloud in primary classes and sessions that *were* included were often associated with written work and viewed negatively by children. This research echoes many of the findings from Hempel-Jorgensen et al. (2018). They researched four primary schools in England where reading for pleasure was “high on the agenda” (p.88) and found that reading aloud was not a timetabled activity. Although teachers referenced it as part of their reading provision, any sessions that did occur were often short (usually 6 and 10 minutes) with a text of the teacher’s choosing. Additionally (and similarly to Safford (2014)) the focus of the sessions was often on developing vocabulary and comprehension skills rather than reader response.

Reading aloud is different from ‘storytelling’ with the former being based on a written text and the latter an oral practice. However, the findings from Ryan and Schatt’s (2014) study are perhaps relevant here in relation to developing children into lifelong readers. They investigated the impact of the longest running storytelling program in the US by interviewing the program’s current and former students. Although the program used oral storytelling rather than reading aloud, the insights suggest that the impact on individuals was ‘enduring’ and lifelong. Participants spoke of their emotional responses to listening to stories describing the experience as ‘emotionally relaxing’ and declaring that it was “the best” and “paradise” (p143). All the interviewees stated that the program had encouraged a love of stories in adulthood. Interestingly, most of the participants could not remember the stories that were told

but many had strong recollections of the rituals of “walking to the library” and “being triggered into a calmer state when sitting on the rug”. Ryan and Schatt identified these as experiences of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), highlighting its importance in relation to promoting reading for pleasure long term.

2.4.2.2 Independent reading

In school, the term independent reading or voluntary reading (Krashen, 2004) is often used to refer to the opportunities for children to read for pleasure when texts are self-selected. Providing children with opportunities to read independently has been advocated not only as an opportunity to enjoy reading but also as a practice that improves reading ability; the amount of time spent reading is positively correlated to reading skills (Mol & Bus, 2011; Schiefele et al., 2012; Stanovich, 1986). However, the extent to which children engage in independent reading appears to differ; factors such as texts available (Krashen, 2013) and teachers’ knowledge of texts (Cremin, T. et al., 2014) are seemingly influential.

Pflaum & Bishop (2004) worked with children aged 8 to 14 years in four middle schools in the US to discover which reading practices they considered to be important. Independent reading was often highlighted as a positive experience and the important factors highlighted were the choice of reading materials, quiet working conditions and the fact that the reading was not associated with further literacy work.

The importance of choice during independent reading is also supported by Hall, Hedrick & Williams (2014). Working with children aged 8 and 9 years, they conducted a four-week-long project designed to provide opportunities for children to become autonomous learners by encouraging them to make choices and decisions. The researchers asked the children about their interests and hobbies prior to the

research and provided four new books per pupil (fiction and non-fiction) based on their preferences; these were made available during independent reading sessions for anyone to choose from. They suggest that, although the library was large and well-stocked, the provision of high-interest books in the classroom allowed the children to experience ownership and empowered them as learners. The project also included time for talk at the end of the sessions and teachers provided starters for those struggling to begin the conversation, for example, 'I'm wondering....'. The children used this time to share opinions and ideas about the books and made connections with other texts. This could be likened to 'inside-text talk' which Safford (2014) describes as "child-initiated conversations about texts and reading" (p.89). She suggests that such talk is part of the reading for pleasure pedagogy and contributes to the development of communities of readers.

Although independent reading is referenced in *The Reading Framework* (DfE, 2021), the guidance is limited. The ability to read independently is simply outlined as the main aim of early reading instruction without any further guidance for schools and teachers in terms of providing 'time' for independent reading. This view is echoed in the *Ofsted Inspection Handbook* (OFSTED, 2022) which focuses primarily on providing opportunities for children to read from 'phonically decodable' books to support reading fluency.

A lack of guidance may lead schools to undervalue independent reading. This was the finding in Hempel et al.'s study (2018); teachers viewed the practice in terms of behaviour management, suggesting that it helped children settle and regain focus following a break. Additionally, teachers often used the time to focus on marking and preparation with low expectations of the practice; compliance from children in the form of sitting quietly at their desks was viewed as acceptable. Hempel et al. (2018)

suggest that this approach to independent reading - which does not value volition and interaction - does little to support children's ownership and engagement in reading. The children in Reedy and Carvalho's (2021) study also suggested that time was an issue both in terms of time devoted to independent reading and lack of time to browse the library; children sometimes selected books under pressure that were of little interest to them. The lack of time for independent reading has been supported more widely (Clark, C. & De Zoysa, 2011; Cremin, T. et al., 2014; Kucirkova & Cremin, T., 2018) and is perhaps an indication that such opportunities lack value and have been marginalised in schools.

Although these studies are small-scale and provide only a snapshot of independent reading, there are some common themes. For independent reading to be considered as part of the reading for pleasure pedagogy, it would seem important that children are not only provided with a free choice of texts and time to read but that advice and support are also necessary. Children also appeared to value quiet conditions for independent reading along with opportunities for book talk.

2.5 Children's perspectives on reading

There have been a number of studies that have explored children's perspectives on aspects of reading. Recognising the formality of an interview with an adult researcher, Wilkinson et al. (2020) conducted a study in Scotland that involved training adolescents to interview their peers, generating data that was used alongside more traditional interviews involving a researcher and participant. The researchers hoped that this method would encourage more informal conversations about reading activities and motivations. The findings from the study highlighted that the adolescents recognised the intrinsic benefits of reading such as relaxation and excitement rather than viewing reading as a vehicle for achieving better grades or

outperforming their peers. Reading did not appear to be a focus in the high schools compared to their experiences in primary schools. Although the findings from both types of interviews were similar, perhaps because the same questions were used, the researchers suggested that this approach offered opportunities for participants to have ownership of the research and also ensured that their voices were prioritised.

The use of focus group interviews can help researchers understand children's perceptions. Reedy and Carvalho (2019) conducted interviews with two groups of Year 5 children in a school in England to explore their understanding of reading for pleasure and themselves as readers. Through the use of an initial questionnaire, the researchers identified four children as 'positive' readers and four children as 'negative' readers. These were then assigned to two focus groups. The excerpts from the data suggested that in the interviews the children were able to share their views by building on answers provided by their peers, offering comments such as 'I agree…' or 'Yeah, like…'. The findings highlighted that the children viewed choice, agency and the environment as important aspects of their development as pleasure readers. The environment at home was preferred to the one in school with reduced noise and comfort identified as important, along with more time to read. Choice was also a factor and books by David Walliams were considered enjoyable as well as the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series by J. Kinney.

Another study that aimed to understand children as readers used an image-based approach to encourage them talk about what they "know, feel and think" about reading (Burnard, 2002, p.2). Children created and discussed a 'rivers of experience' task which represented critical incidents in their reading histories. Hodges (2010) found that this method allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of reading with rich descriptions of the children as readers as opposed to the more

essentialist categories used in schools. The discussions about their creations helped to unearth reflections that may possibly remain hidden, providing children with opportunities to see themselves and their trajectories in new ways.

These studies highlight that, when children are consulted, they are able to articulate their views in relation to reading and to also explore themselves as readers. Children seemed to be intrinsically motivated to read and reading at home was preferred to reading in school; having a quiet and comfortable place to read with a free choice of text would seem important with celebrity and popular authors appearing desirable. At a time when reading is often viewed as a measurable skill to be tested, an understanding of children's views and experiences of reading in school would seem timely. As Mackey suggests,

> Now, more than ever we need thick descriptions of interpretive acts, thick analysis, and thick theorizing. A thick description of reading attends to contributing roles of reader, text, and context. (Mackey, 2003, p. 405)

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I considered and critiqued approaches to literacy and reading from a number of theoretical perspectives. I outlined key research from psycholinguistic, psychological and social perspectives and explored New Literacy Studies and the use of ethnographic approaches to researching literacy as a social practice. I also explored identity: what it is and how it is understood in my study. Recognising identities as social, fluid and multiple, I examined research that considered identity as narrative and position, looking at how children might develop their reading identities through engagement with activities and strategies in school.

This chapter also provided an account of how literacy and reading have developed since the introduction of the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013), looking at the influence

of policy initiatives and testing regimes on how reading is understood and taught. I highlighted how current statutory and non-statutory guidance reflects a cognitive psychological understanding of reading, focusing on isolated skill development.

High-stakes testing, along with statutory and non-statutory guidance, seems to have influenced schools and teachers in their selection of approaches to teaching reading. Recognising the importance of test outcomes, the research reviewed above suggests that teachers appear to make use of approaches to teaching reading that do not necessarily reflect their professional judgement and are perhaps somewhat limiting in terms of the development of children's reading identities and opportunities for them to read for pleasure. Where research was available, I looked at children's interpretations of these activities and strategies, examining the influence on their understanding of what reading is and themselves as readers. Such work suggested that, where skills are taught in isolation, reading appears to be understood as a linear path to success with a focus on decoding and the ability to answer questions about a text. Such approaches, as discussed above, offer little room for reader response.

Activities that value the social nature of reading and promote children's agency seem to offer opportunities for children to become active participants in the reading process contributing to an understanding of reading as a pleasurable activity; relationships, communication, text choice and the opportunity to read without the requirement to complete 'follow-up work', seem to be important. However, much of the research highlights the lack of time and attention devoted to these factors leading to feelings of frustration for children.

This review highlighted how government policy and guidance on reading have been interpreted in the classroom. In this study, I explore how children experience, think and feel about schooled reading in order to develop an understanding of the consequences of government policy decisions for children.

The research questions for this study, as outlined in Chapter 1, are:

1. What is valued about reading in school?
2. In what ways are children positioned in relation to schooled reading?
3. How do children experience, think and feel about reading in school?

    d) What reading activities and strategies do children experience in school?

    e) How do children engage with these reading activities and strategies?

I will now outline the methodological approach used in this study and explore a range of ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 Methodology, Data generation and Ethics

3.1 Introduction

In this section, I will discuss the methodological approach of this study which was interpretivist adopting an ethnographic approach. I will explain the design in relation to developing an understanding of children's experiences, feelings and thoughts about schooled reading.

The study took place in primary school; I worked with a class of 23 Year 5 children for eight months. I spent time in the classroom alongside the children and made use of interviews. I was keen to learn about what types of reading were valued in school and how children were positioned in relation to the approaches used.

I begin with a rationale for the study exploring the suitability of an ethnographic approach by considering ethnography more broadly. I then outline the study in more detail describing the field location and methods used. I consider my own role as part of the research, reflecting on my views, opinions and biases as I engaged reflexively with the data as it was generated. There were times when I helped to shape what happened more than others and I describe how my involvement in the process seemed to create opportunities to further my knowledge and understanding of the children's developing reading identities. I conclude with an exploration of ethical considerations relevant to this study, examining regulatory factors and how this guidance played out in the field.

3.2 Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative methodology, looking to consider 'text' rather than 'numerical' data. Using an interpretivist approach, I aimed to examine everyday lives considering how people construct and enact meaning (Denzin, 1999). Interpretivists

believe that there are multiple realities that exist in relation to the context where they occur (Pickard, 2013). Brockman (2011) suggests that interpretative research is concerned with ‘understanding’ rather than validity; it begins with a view that reality is socially constructed, examining the perspectives of the participants in everyday situations (Flick, 2018). This understanding was useful as the study focused on the children’s experiences, thoughts and feelings about reading in their school.

Social constructionism provided a framework for exploring the concept of reading identity. Burr suggests that social constructionists accept one or more of the following:

- A critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge
- Historical and cultural specificity
- Knowledge is sustained by social processes
- Knowledge and social action go together

(Burr, 2015, pp.2-5)

Social processes relate to context and interaction that are viewed as central to identity construction (Gee, 2012). Adopting a critical stance offered opportunities to question assumptions used as the basis for decision-making, for example, where reading levels were used as a guide for text suitability. Historical and cultural influences in relation to reading in school can also be considered, such as the influence of testing and league tables on how schools and teachers understand reading and the influence these have on reading pedagogy.

I will now explore ethnography and ethnographic approaches, outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the study. By considering ethnography’s potential in

terms of exploring children's lives, I will explain how an ethnographic approach was appropriate. Although the length of time in the field did not warrant the label 'ethnography', the study draws on ethnographic approaches making use of interviews, participant observation and photographs, aiming to privilege children's voices about the reading curriculum they experienced.

3.2.1 An ethnographic approach to data generation

In an era where teachers' control over curriculum content and pedagogy have reduced (Lowe, 2007) and their own values are "challenged or displaced by the terrors of performativity" (Ball, 2003, p.216), "children are at risk of not being seriously considered or consulted" (Hancock & Mansfield, 2002, p.197). Central control over what happens in school has reached "unprecedented levels" (Cremin, H., Mason, & Busher, 2011, p.586) and perhaps, as a consequence, the appetite for listening to children's views regarding how decisions affect them is somewhat questionable (Ball, 2005; Whitty, 2002). Assumptions are often made about children's literacy lives by policymakers, school leaders and teachers (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2015). I felt it was important to understand children's experiences, thoughts and feelings relating to schooled reading in such a climate. In Chapter 2 I outlined approaches to studying literacy and suggested that research considering literacy as a social practice offered the potential to provide insights into children's views and participatory methods provide a way of "reclaiming voice, breaking silence – allowing perspectives, experiences to be spoken and heard that have not been present in traditional research" (Hamilton, Ivanic, & Barton, 1992, p.113). Drawing particularly on Heath (1983) and Maybin's (2007a) studies, I recognised the value of an ethnographic approach.

Ethnography can be described as a theoretical stance rather than simply a set of methods. Rooted in anthropology, it emerged as a way of developing an in-depth understanding of 'other' cultures, often through long-term immersion in the field "predicated upon attention to the everyday" to develop "an intimate knowledge of face-to-face communities and groups" (Marcus, 1995, p.99). Grounded in the "interpretations of the people involved in the social event" (Bloome, 2011, p.18), it places an emphasis on the social and cultural processes in the classroom setting with a view to understanding the current situation (Geertz, 1975). Pole and Morrison (2003) suggest that the aim of ethnography is to provide an account of "the subjective reality of the experiences of those people who constitute and construct the social world", emphasising the "situated meaning" and "contextualised experience as a basis for explaining and understanding social behaviour" (p.5). As such, the researcher's theoretical standpoint is an important consideration.

A positivist approach to ethnography can be described as naturalism: the study of the social world in its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher, with the aim of providing data that is truly representative of those observed. Researchers might adopt a 'fly-on-the-wall' approach, minimising their influence on the situation in an attempt to "represent social phenomena in some literal fashion" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.11). Alternatively, increased or total participation in the field could also be seen as a means of providing a 'true' account of the participant's perspectives where the researcher, assuming a role similar to that of a child, feels able to speak *for* the children. According to Jules-Rosette (1978), this can be achieved by the researcher's total immersion in the culture or society being studied. However, the extent to which an adult can fully assume the role of a child is debatable (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

Researchers who aim to neutralise their role may miss opportunities to clarify meanings; a view of knowledge as socially constructed recognises that “making facts is a social enterprise” (Hubbard, 1988, p.5) and interaction with participants might be seen as a useful tool to generate data. As Rallis (2010) suggests, the dangers of adopting a neutral position might be missed information and misinterpretation. For example, children who did not appear to be on task during silent reading activities may be judged to be reluctant or lacking in motivation. Conversations with these children, however, might reveal alternative explanations. As Hammersley and Atkinson point out, once the idea of a neutral researcher has been abandoned, the researcher becomes the “research instrument par excellence” (2007, p.17).

An interpretive ethnography encourages the researcher to become involved in the study; it places emphasis on the personal engagement of the researcher with participants with the aim of unearthing meaning which reflects the current context and provides a deep understanding of aspects of the researched world (Mantzoukas, 2012). The process of understanding an insider’s perspective can only be achieved, I believe, through an approach where the researcher explores “how the local and outsider views are related” (Street, 2012b, p.41). This involves the researcher considering the insider’s viewpoint (emic) alongside their own ‘etic’ (outsider’s) perspective. The resulting knowledge and understanding of the insider’s perspective are developed through an examination of how these two viewpoints inform each other. For example, Heath’s ethnography (as outlined in section 2.1.3.1) over three decades demonstrated the value of the researcher’s relationships with participants. She was able to live, work and play with the children and families which allowed for a thorough understanding of the role literacy in people’s lives, how it might be defined and implications for future education practice. By highlighting individual stories, she

demonstrated, through thoughtful and sensitive analysis, the social literacy practices already evident in society. An approach where the researcher and participants "invest in" and are "rewarded by" the project, encourages both parties to achieve their objectives through negotiation and cooperation (Pink, 2013, p.65). The value of a prolonged period in the field is recognised in this study; working with the children for two and a half terms provided me with an opportunity to develop relationships with the staff and children and consider their responses in interviews in the context of the classroom.

Maybin's (2007a) study highlights the value of a contextualised approach. Her linguistic ethnography made use of interviews, field work and audio recordings of talk where children wore individual recording devices throughout the school day. She believed that her inclusive approach to classroom talk enabled an understanding of the "hybrid mix of official, semi-official and unofficial readings and writings" and that by moving into the children's perspectives on classroom life, she was able to highlight the importance of "interpersonal and emotive functions…in the shaping of meaning" (p184). Although the lives of the children in the classroom were dominated by school literacy practices, Maybin was able to discover the contribution of talk between children towards knowledge acquisition, socialisation and their personal development. This contextualised approach to collecting and interpreting children's talk relies on the researcher's detailed understanding of the situation and of the "referential and evaluative content" of the children's talk (p185). Commenting on Maybin's research, Richards (2008) suggests that "[i]t raises interesting questions about analytical positioning and the extent to which researchers need to fashion individual approaches to suit their interpretive needs" (p157). Maybin (2007a) recognised the importance of her role, identifying the need for "an ethnographic

understanding of the events and scenarios being depicted" (p79). By considering responses in interviews alongside my findings from field work in the classroom, I was able to develop a better understanding of the aspects of reading which were important to the children.

The kind of evidence generated through ethnographic research is different to the evidence valued by policymakers seeking to improve standards as judged by children's ability to pass tests (Stannard & Huxford, 2007). Heath and Maybin's studies illustrate how ethnographic accounts can raise questions about methods advocated by policymakers and provide useful alternatives in relation to how literacy and learning are conceptualised in education. Working closely with the children, I hoped to develop a collaborative approach to the research whereby participants were recognised as active agents within the research process. A collaborative approach, I believe, helped to prioritise children's perspectives. The recognition of children's voices as "multidimensional and always relationally intertwined" (Castro, 2017, p.140) can help to generate "dialogue and conversation" which, according to Schwandt (2001), are "conditions in which understanding emerges" (p.181).

Considering the offerings of ethnographic research from a New Literacy Studies' perspective, I believed that the use of an ethnographic approach examining 'reading' in school might help to identify reading activities that value children's identities and possibly provide a means of addressing the multiple influences that affect their reading experiences and perspectives (Moje, 2000).

3.3 Research design

I decided that an ethnographic approach using participant observation combined with interviews with both children and the class teacher would provide insight into

children's experiences, feelings and thoughts about reading. Direct engagement with the children through participant observation in the classroom provided opportunities to systematically record and describe activities and strategies related to reading in context, investigating pupils' intentions and opinions through discussion and detailed observation. I will now outline the study in more detail providing details of location, time in the field, activities and strategies used in Amber class along with a discussion of methods and the role of the researcher.

3.3.1 Field location

The location for the research was Amber class (23 Year 5 children – 9- to 10-year-olds) at Rainside Primary School in the north of England. It is a state-funded school with 219 children on roll at the time of the study. Access to Rainside school was provided through Mr Dickens, the class teacher. The school had a low number of children receiving free school meals – 9% compared to a national average of 23%. The number of children receiving Special Educational Needs support was in line with national averages (13.7% at Rainside compared with 12.6% national average) and there were no children with English as an additional language. Results in SATs for reading were consistently 'good'. Recent Ofsted inspections (short inspection in January 2018 and full inspection in September 2018) described reading levels as 'well above' the national average. Ofsted reported that pupils enjoyed reading and that there was a wide range of books available.

I selected Rainside school as I knew Mr Dickens, having worked as a literacy consultant in a school where he was previously employed (see section 1.3). Mr Dickens was new to the school. He was appointed as deputy headteacher in September 2018 and, midway through the year, he informed me that he would also become the literacy lead in the next academic year. The main reason for working

with Mr Dickens was that I was aware that he enjoyed reading. I had assumed that this would be reflected in his teaching and reading for pleasure would be high on the agenda. In practice, however, the children shared stories that reflected their understandings of being 'behind' and 'rubbish' which I was, of course, obliged to report. I will expand on the ethical dilemma of my relationship with Mr Dickens in section 3.4.

3.3.2 Time in the field

I visited the school on 16 occasions spending 36 hours with the children overall. (See Appendix A for a summary of dates and times of visits). A study such as this relies on the assumption that what is observed is "typical of what always happens there" (Hammersley, 2006, p.5) and long-term trends can be explored. By visiting the classroom on different days of the week and varying the pattern between full-days and half-days, "cyclical variability and fundamental patterns of change" (p.5) were taken into consideration such as a shift in topic, use of supply teachers, etc. However, I only managed 16 visits in total, mainly due to my role as a lecturer; the university is busy at certain times of the year and this served to restrict opportunities for field work. The limited visits may have reduced opportunities for in-depth social interactions with some members of the class as children who were more confident tended to engage in conversation with me more often. It also reduced the insights I gained about how children experienced reading in this classroom.

3.3.3 Focus of study

My initial focus was 'schooled reading' (see section 1.1) as this was my main area of interest and I wanted to find out more about how children experienced reading in the classroom. I was interested to learn about children's experiences, feelings and thoughts about 'schooled' reading; how they were positioned by activities and

strategies used in class and the significance of these for their reading identities. It is worth noting here however that opportunities to observe planned reading activities were limited during my time in the class as literacy lessons tended to focus on writing. Consequently, the insights generated through the interviews became even more important than I had anticipated.

Additionally, I found that children shared information with me and I witnessed events that could be deemed ‘unofficial’ reading such as children’s conversations and comments which might be considered ‘off task’. For example, Joe and Billy engaged in conversations about a text in a reading comprehension session and worked together which was in direct opposition to Mr Dicken’s instructions for children to work independently. Also, some of the children discussed events from their reading lives at home which contributed to my understanding of how they positioned themselves as readers away from school. Recognising that there might be a tendency for studies that take place exclusively within a school setting to interpret children’s behaviour as a product of those situations, I felt that it was important to consider influences from other areas of their life. I, therefore, considered children’s discussions about aspects of their lives away from school along with ‘unofficial’ reading events.

To contextualise what follows I begin with a brief overview of the different kinds of reading activities that were planned and describe key 'spaces' for reading such as the library and guided reading shelves.

3.3.4 Reading activities and resources

The activities discussed by the children in relation to schooled reading included staged reading, guided reading (both carousel and whole class), independent

reading (labelled ‘free’ reading) and reading aloud (see section 2.4 for a discussion of the research associated with these strategies and activities). One other lesson of note was a session based in the library where children learned about choosing books; this will be labelled as the ‘library session’. The reading activities and strategies discussed in this section are ones that Mr Dickens ‘inherited’ (his word). During the year, he made several changes to how reading was taught in his class, which I will discuss along with the existing activities and strategies.

Guided reading was timetabled and this included one weekly session of independent reading which was removed halfway through the year. Reading activities that were not timetabled included reading aloud and independent reading before and after official lessons. In the interviews, the children also spoke about staged reading. The activities and strategies are summarised in table 1 below:

Amber Class - Reading Timetable				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Guided reading 1 hour	Guided reading 1 hour	Guided reading 1 hour	Guided reading 1 hour	Guided reading 1 hour
Independent reading: before school begins or when work has been completed				
Reading aloud: an option at the end of the day				

Table 1 Amber Class - Reading Timetable

3.3.4.1 Guided reading

Initially, guided reading took the form of a ‘carousel’ and children were organised into five groups. Each of the five groups was allocated a different reading task each day, working through all five tasks over the course of one week. It would appear, therefore, that although the sessions were all labelled ‘guided reading’, only one activity – reading with the teacher – could be considered as a guided reading

session (see section 2.4.1.2). The activities included in guided reading are summarised in table 2 below:

Guided reading timetable	
Activity 1	**Working with teacher** reading and discussion with the teacher based on the section read from the group novel in pre-read or a SAT paper from a previous examination
Activity 2	**Follow-up** providing written answers to questions about the section read from the novel in pre-read and with the teacher
Activity 3	**Comprehension** providing written answers about a text (unrelated to their guided reading novel) on a worksheet or a SAT paper from a previous examination
Activity 4	**Free read** time to read independently from a self-selected text from the library (changed to visual literacy halfway through the year)
Activity 5	**Pre-read** reading the section of text from the group novel in preparation for 'working with the teacher' and 'follow-up'

Table 2 Amber class guided reading timetable

The guided reading sessions usually lasted an hour. The texts (physical books or worksheets) and activities used in the sessions were chosen by Mr Dickens. Aspects of the approach used in Amber class relate to *The National Literacy Strategy* (DfEE, 1998); children who read with the teacher had an opportunity to read, think about and discuss the shared text. These sessions also involved children taking turns reading aloud from the text in a similar way to that observed by Fisher (2008).

However, the remaining four activities did not offer opportunities for discussion; time was provided for independent reading or children were required to produce written answers about a text. Mr Dickens was released from his classroom duties on Tuesdays and Mrs Barker, a regular supply teacher at the school, taught the class; this included the guided reading session.

During the year, Mr Dickens changed the approach to guided reading from carousel guided reading to whole-class guided reading, described as ‘shared reading’ in the NatLS. In whole-class guided reading the children remained in the same groupings but everyone worked on the same task (which involved answering questions about a novel) apart from the group who worked with the teacher.

The children were organised into groups for all guided reading sessions with names such as ‘Saturn’ and ‘Pluto’ that did not convey any suggestion that they were organised in a particular manner. However, the children recognised that they were based on ability; ‘[w]e’ve all got different levels,’ explained Kerry. Tulip described the levels as ‘[e]asy, medium, hard’ and suggested that allocation to a group ‘depend[ed] on what stage you’re on’. Figure 1 below shows the guided reading timetable for each group.

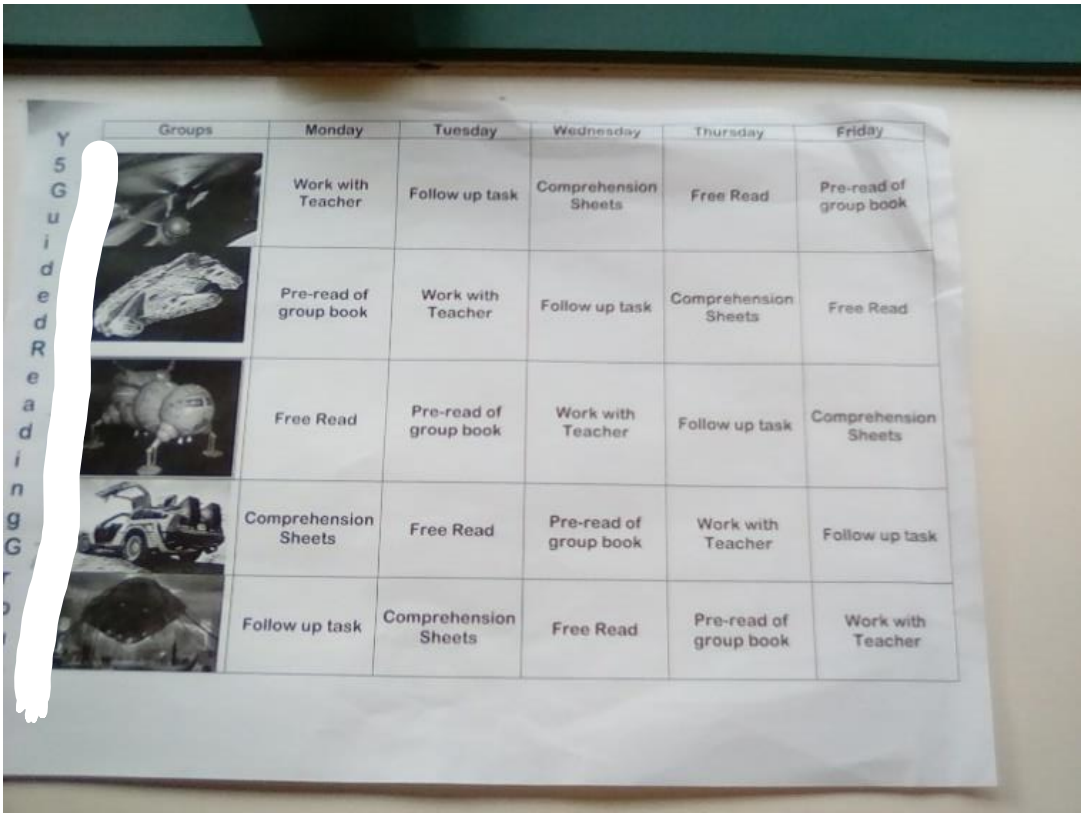


Figure 1 Guided reading timetable

In Chapter 5 I will discuss the children's views of 'carousel' guided reading and I will also consider data from field notes which related both to the 'carousel' and 'whole-class' approach.

3.3.4.2 Independent reading

Time for independent reading (or free reading) was allocated both as part of the guided reading approach and also before and after official lessons. However, halfway through the year, Mr Dickens changed the 'free' reading task to 'visual literacy'. He explained in an interview that he was using an online site called *Pobble 365* (Smith, J., 2023) to support children's understanding in this area. The site provides a different image (photograph, painting, sketch, etc.) for every day of the year along with a list of questions and ideas for activities.

3.3.4.3 Staged reading

The children were allocated to a reading stage between '1' and '16-plus' with the numbers referring to their decoding ability. The stages were based on the *Treetops Reading Scheme* (Oxford University Press, n.d.). The staged books (both scheme and authentic) were placed in each Key Stage; boxes for stages 1 to 7 were placed in Key Stage 1 and boxes for stages 8 to 15 were placed in Key Stage 2, just outside the library (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Staged reading boxes Key Stage 2

Stage '16-plus' increased the children's choice to *certain* bookshelves in the school library with 'free' reader indicating that a child had completed every stage and they could choose books freely from the library. As Molly pointed out,

> [b]asically you go up in the stages - the stages out there - and then once you've moved up to free reader you can come in here and choose any of the books.

Stage 16-plus effectively unlocked the key to the library door.

I will use the terms 'stage' and 'level' interchangeably to describe this practice as although most researchers use 'level or levelled', children at Rainside school used the term 'stage'. Both of these have associations with the view of reading as a linear

path with particular stages for children to work through (Chall, 1983) (see section 2.4.1.1 for further discussion).

3.3.4.4 Reading aloud

Reading aloud occurred either when texts were read aloud as a stimulus for writing tasks or as part of story time at the end of the day when Mr Dickens would read from a fictional book.

3.3.4.5 Library session

In addition to the reading activities already mentioned, I observed one other lesson which might be considered as a 'reading' lesson. Mr Dickens organised a session in the library which supported children's understanding of how to choose books. He provided a range of books for the children to choose from and they examined the front cover and blurb as part of the selection process. Once the children had selected a book, they were required to design their own book cover using the chosen text as an example. I helped to choose the books and will reflect on my participation in section 3.3.7.3.

3.3.4.6 Organisation

The texts available to the children at Rainside school were predominantly physical books: fiction and non-fiction. I observed that these were stored in a number of areas including the classroom, corridor and library. The library was large and included books that were deemed suitable for all children in school including fiction and non-fiction. Cushions and other soft furnishings were also provided. I took photographs prior to the interviews with the children as I thought this would be useful for me to refer to when considering the children's photographs and listening to their interviews (see figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3 School library shelves

Figure 4 School library beanbags and cushions

The fiction novels were initially organised alphabetically according to the author's surname. Halfway through the year new shelves were installed and fiction books were reorganised into genres. This was intended to support children in locating texts more easily.

In the corridor outside of Amber class, books were organised in a number of ways: a small bookcase provided fiction novels for Year 5 and 6 children to read during independent reading (see figures 5 and 6) and a set of shelves provided fiction novels for use in guided reading (see figures 7 and 8).

Figure 5 Year 5 and 6 bookshelves

Figure 6 Year 5 and 6 bookshelves

Figure 7 Year 5 and 6 guided reading books

Figure 8 Year 5 and 6 guided reading books

Later in the year, following the ‘library session’, Mr Dickens installed a small bookcase in the classroom with a range of fiction and non-fiction novels along with some picture books (see figure 9). Access to these books was determined by a number of factors which I will explore later.

Figure 9 Amber class's library

3.3.5 Entering the field

Entering the field is recognised as a complicated process whereby the researcher considers multiple factors such as relationships, rituals and setting (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). I visited the school for an introductory visit in October 2018 to outline the research to staff and children and give out consent forms. This also provided children with the opportunity to meet me and ask questions.

Mr Dickens introduced me to the children and explained that I would be visiting their class during the year to find out about reading. I shared pictures with them to illustrate where I worked, what I did for a job and information about my home life (see Appendix B). I felt that it was important to be open about aspects of my personal life, for example, sharing pictures of my dogs, as I would be asking the

children to share details of their lives too. Building trust is an important factor when working with children.

I had intended to begin the study in September 2018. However, the start was delayed due to an Ofsted visit and began instead in October 2018. The delay also allowed time for Mr Dickens to establish himself in his new role as deputy head teacher. Although the available time did not allow for a lengthy period of familiarisation, I found that by arriving in school early and sitting with the children at their desks I was able to develop relationships quite quickly. After a few visits, many of the children greeted me with enthusiasm and were keen to share information about their activities away from school. Some even showed me personal possessions that they had brought to school.

During the first day in the classroom, I recorded as much detail as possible about the classroom environment, routines and the children's behaviour, recognising the value of making the 'familiar' appear 'strange'. As Delamont suggests, a "good ethnography needs to fight familiarity" (2013, p.11). I tried to achieve this by purposefully avoiding dialogue with the adults in the room regarding the purpose of lessons and intended outcomes for the children. This information, I felt, would draw me into thought processes associated with my previous role as a teacher. Additionally, I paid attention to small details, recognising that this could provide an insight into the reading culture in the classroom:

> Mr Dickens has rearranged the tables this morning – the children are sat more in rows rather than groups. I sit with Kerry, Molly and Ellen. They tell me that they know where to sit because they have trays under the tables. They are 'private' says Ellen, 'no-one else can look in – it's kinda nice' she adds. Ellen has a secret diary and some notes, Kerry shows me her tray and Molly says she has a 'reading book' in hers.

> Reflection: A ‘reading’ book – this is an interesting description of a book. What else would a book be for other than for reading?
>
> (9th November 2018 Field Notes and Reflection)

When I was a teacher, I too would have referred to the books allocated to the children from the reading scheme or library as ‘reading’ books, but as I tried to question the everyday events and language used I was able to consider alternative views of the approaches to reading.

3.3.6 Methods

The study made use of ethnographic methods which included participant observation, photo-elicitation interviews and semi-structured interviews. These were recorded in the form of field notes, reflective journal entries, photographs and audio recordings. The intention was to observe children as they engaged with reading practices in the classroom and photo-elicitation interviews would provide the children with an opportunity to share their views regarding reading in school.

3.3.6.1 Participant observation

I generated data during my visits with a particular focus on activities where school-based reading was viewed as central to the purpose of the activity. I felt that this would help me to gain insights into how children are constructed as readers in relation to the school curriculum (for a summary of dates and times of my visits to the school, see Appendix A).

The data generated were, therefore, intended to address the main aim of the study relating to the children’s experiences, feelings and thoughts in relation to reading activities and strategies, focusing primarily – although not exclusively - on schooled reading. As outlined in section 3.3.4 these activities took the form of guided reading sessions, a library visit and reading aloud. Such activities could be termed “literacy

events" which Heath (1982) describes as "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (p.50).

I sat with the children and observed and recorded their conversations and behaviour in note form, occasionally placing audio recorders on tables to capture further detail of their conversations. I sought permission from those involved before using the recorder and took care to consider anyone who demonstrated that they did not consent through their behaviour, for example, by withdrawing physically from the recorder. If I felt that the recorder was having a negative impact on the children, for example, when children began whispering so that their voices could not be heard, I removed the recorder. I found that it was difficult at times to use the audio recorder as some children were not part of the study and could not be involved. As such, recordings in class were minimal. I did, however, make detailed notes of conversations and comments. I felt that these would help me to understand what sort of reading was valued in school.

Field notes made "in the field" helped to capture the "urgent business" of the day (Denscombe, 2014, p.217). These allowed for observations of both verbal and non-verbal communications and enabled me to understand how my knowledge of the field, or lack of it, was affecting the data I collected (Delamont, 2017). Emerson, Frey and Shaw (2011) describe the process of writing field notes as selective and a form of analysis.

I wrote three types of field notes: descriptive, reflexive and reflective (Jeffrey, 2018). Descriptive field notes aim to describe in detail the context including the participants and can be considered more as a form of observation than analysis. For example, I

entered the classroom one afternoon and tried to capture the sights and sounds in the following description:

> There is lots of chat, shouts and movement as people try to organise each other – this includes the children and a midday supervisor.
>
> (2nd April 2019 Field Notes)

Reflexive field notes recognise the role of the researcher within the research and that all field notes are effectively 'filtered' (Jeffrey, 2018) through them. An awareness of the process supports researchers in identifying preconceptions and enables personal experience to be considered as part of the researcher's relations with the participants in the field. For example, when observing Mrs Barker (a supply teacher) I commented:

> Reflection – supply teachers. I have been a supply teacher and sometimes children treat supply differently. I feel that this is sometimes due to the way the class teacher treats supply teachers – they model a lack of respect which is copied by the children. There is no such issue here. The children respond positively to Mrs Barker. (20th November 2018 Field Notes)

Reflective field notes offer the researcher the option to write about the situation from the point of view of the participants with a possible analysis. One such example occurred when the 'friendship group' was tidying the library.

> Reflection: The book on divorce has touched something inside Daisy - a connection with her home life. It obviously made her stop and think about things at home. It prompted her to want to talk about those experiences. At first she was puzzled as to why the book was there. She felt that this was an adult issue and perhaps not something to discuss but then, as she read the book, she found that it was a child's book and she recognised it was for children like her. Perhaps it made her realise she wasn't the only one - someone who had written that book knew how she felt. Daisy could see her situation and perhaps she stopped feeling alone. When she spoke aloud about her experience that invited Francis to join in.

> Reading is: an opportunity to make links between our own and others' experiences, to share worries and concerns.
>
> (8th March 2019 Field Notes - Reflection)

My comments here illustrate the role of the researcher as central to the research. Through my field notes, I interpreted what was happening and imagined how Daisy was feeling. This is not to say that my comments were an *accurate* reflection of Daisy's response, more that the process of writing allowed for an exploration of ideas and acted as an initial form of analysis.

By using a mixture of these approaches, I was able to write field notes both whilst on site and later at home when I typed the notes up. Field notes are often considered the first step into analysis and I will expand on this later in this chapter.

3.3.6.2 Photo-elicitation interviews

To find out about children's experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding reading in school, I decided to use photo-elicitation interviews (Collier, 1957). The photographs used in the interviews were taken by the children themselves which provided an opportunity for them to influence the focus of the study and highlight areas that they considered important. In addition to their use in the interviews, the children's photographs (along with ones I had taken myself) were also used to support my analysis and to focus on aspects of reading highlighted by the children.

Children were asked to take photographs using tablet devices to represent something they would like to talk about/tell me about reading in their school. I shared the task with the children a few weeks before the interviews to give them time to consider what they would like to photograph and discuss options with peers. To prepare the children for the interviews, Mr Dickens explained that I was trying to find

out about reading and what they, as pupils, thought about the way it was taught in school.

The children were given a limit of three photographs each and I hoped that this would help them to focus on areas that were pertinent to them. The use of children's photographs in the study also helped the process of making the familiar strange (Delamont, 2017) as the children presented images of 'reading' from their perspective. This not only helped to support my understanding of their perceptions of schooled reading but also helped to broaden my view from those activities and strategies I could only observe in the classroom.

The children were given permission to take photographs anywhere in the school but should not include people in their photographs for ethical reasons. They were asked to work in twos or threes and the children organised the groups themselves. I considered that groups based on friendships would encourage children to feel supported and relaxed (Einarsdóttir, 2003).

The interviews took place in spaces such as corridors, the library and a small office next to the classroom (see figure 10). These were places familiar to the children and close to the classroom.

Figure 10 Interview location

Photo-elicitation is a participatory method that encourages participants to adopt the role of co-researcher (Holm, G., 2018). This method is considered empowering for participants, encouraging them to collaborate with the researcher in relation to the design of the study (Torre & Murphy, 2015). The right for children to voice their opinions and be heard is supported by *The United Conventions on the Rights of the Child* (UNICEF, 1989). As James, Jenks and Prout (1998) argue, children are agentic social actors with their own understanding of the social worlds in which they participate.

Photo-elicitation interviews can also challenge the power dynamic between researcher and researched and I hoped to adopt the role of 'least adult' (see section 3.3.7 for a detailed discussion). It could be reasonably assumed that the children would view me in a similar way to other adults in school in terms of 'teacher-like'

status (Cappello, 2005) and answer questions or provide information that may be adapted to suit what the child thinks the researcher wants to hear rather than "engaging in thoughtful dialogue" (Cappello, 2005, p.172). Collaboration between myself and the participants might have helped to redress the unequal status of the researcher and participants, empowering the children and providing "maximum" opportunities for them to express their views (Davis, J. M., 1998, p.329). As Pink (2013) points out, by "focusing on collaboration and the idea of creating something together, agency becomes shared between the researcher and the participant" (p.65). Also, by encouraging the children to discuss photographs they had taken themselves, I hoped to avoid the possibility of pupils trying to please the researcher. As Collier (1957) comments, the use of photographs can "trigger responses that might lie submerged in verbal interviewing" and "shatter the composure of a guarded reply" (p.854).

Finally, the use of photo-elicitation provided children with an opportunity to draw attention to less visible aspects of schooled reading (Allen, 2009). For example, there were limited opportunities for children to read independently in class and this aspect of reading did not feature prominently in my field notes. However, the choice of text and opportunities for independent reading were popular topics covered in many of the interviews. Molly took a photograph of a selection of books to illustrate the wider choices available for those who had achieved the status of 'free' reader (see figure 11).

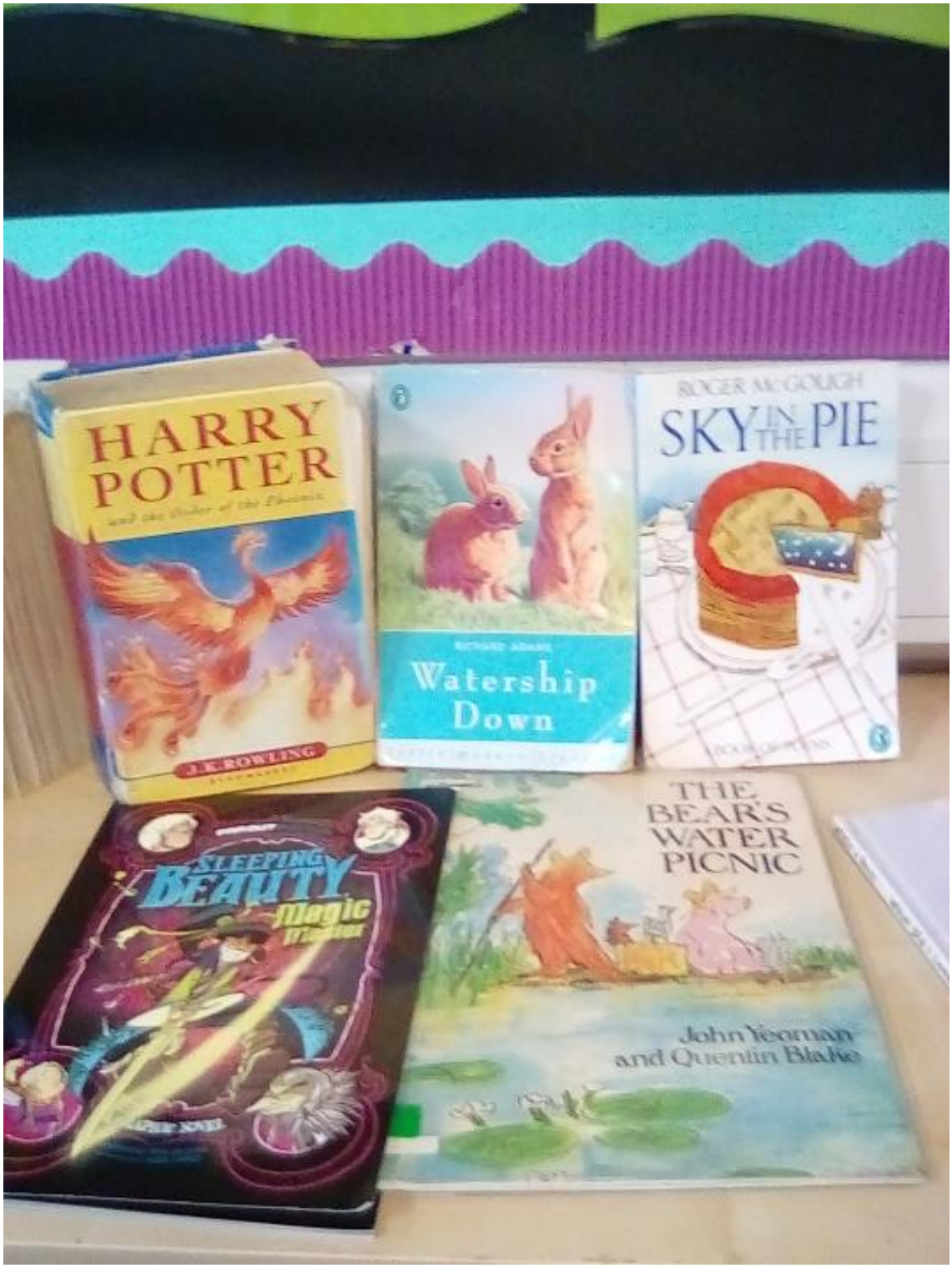


Figure 11 Free reader books (Molly)

Group interviews offered the children the opportunity to engage in discussion and allowed me to gain access to a range of views and opinions about reading in a relatively short space of time compared to participant observation. The potential drawbacks of such an approach might be that children felt unable to give their own

opinion and express views that aligned with their friends. If I considered that this was the case, I offered words of support. For example, when Tulip shared her views of the author, David Walliams, I ensured that her views were heard.

> TULIP: No, because I'm not a big fan of David Williams.
>
> KERRY: So you take it out of [crosstalk].
>
> INTERVIEWER: Oh, Tulip's not a fan of David Williams.
>
> DAISY: So it takes you on a big adventure, but it's a boring big adventure.
>
> INTERVIEWER: You tell us, Tulip, what happens with you?
>
> TULIP: Well, when I read David Walliams books, I get bored after the first page. But then when I read a few chapters-- when I read an exciting book, I keep on reading it, but then when I finish it, I just read it again.

Some children were keen to share their opinions and could dominate the interviews. I attempted to counter this by sometimes asking individual children what they thought about a particular topic. For example, ‘What about you Daisy? What do you think about comprehension?’. It was interesting to note that as the interviews progressed, I adopted the vocabulary used by the children to describe reading in school such as ‘comprehension’, ‘stage’ and ‘free’ reading. The effect of this may have been to support the children’s view that I understood and accepted their view of reading. Alternatively, my use of shared vocabulary may also have served to frame or limit what the children spoke about.

All interviews were audio recorded. This limited the data to a record of spoken language. A multimodal approach, considering ‘modes’ of communication such as movement, body positioning, gaze and gesture may have highlighted important factors relating to communication and relationships. As Kress (2001) pointed out, interaction may involve many modes of communication, language is just one of those modes. If we consider forming relationships and being receptive to others as

important in supporting children's communicative experiences then multimodal analysis may offer a useful insight.

Flewitt, Nind and Payler (2009) suggest that where priority is given to spoken and written language, educational settings are often organised to reflect these priorities. Research and analysis of literacy practices that incorporates how we communicate meanings, develop relationships and value children within educational settings may help to challenge the narrow view of literacy evident in schools. The use of video may have provided an alternative view to the data generated by field notes and audio recordings. However, when considering the use of video, I was influenced by my own experiences. I had often agreed to conferences, meetings, lessons etc., being video recorded, only to find that the whole experience made me anxious and more likely to avoid talk of any kind for fear of being judged. I am aware that this was a personal decision but I believed that it was important for me to feel comfortable with what I was asking the teacher and children to do as part of the research.

On occasion, I did comment on the children's physical movements to support my understanding of what was being said. For example, the following data extract suggests that the children enjoyed certain reading practices more than others and I comment on Joe's behaviour to aid my recall of the event:

> INTERVIEWER: Yeah? What do you think about reading in school, Joe?
>
> JOE: It's just not very interesting, I guess. I mean, normally, I'm doing something else.
>
> INTERVIEWER: It's like a going-to-sleep position, thats. Isn't it [laughter]?
>
> FELICITY: For example, my ooh position [laughter]-- and then in free reading, I was like, "Finally."

Noting examples of behaviour was useful when I later listened to the audio recording as I was able to interpret Joe's statement of 'doing something else' as sleeping.

The use of audio recorders in the interviews did appear to distract some children. For example, Joe asked, 'Do you know that it's still listening to us?' during the initial part of the interview. The recorder could perhaps be considered as another participant or observer. However, references to the recorders were infrequent.

The interviews took place immediately after the children had taken their photographs. They shared their images one at a time and explained what they had taken a photograph of and why. I felt that it was useful for the children to be able to share what was important to them and to know that I was listening to their views, rather than focusing on my own agenda (Stafford, Laybourn, Hill, & Walker, 2003). This 'unstructured' approach to the photo-elicitation part of the interviews supported the children in making decisions about the focus and direction of the interview whilst also receiving guidance from me (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Nearly all photographs were taken indoors and the children went to great lengths to illustrate the aspect of reading that they wanted to highlight. For example, some children returned to the classroom to collect materials to photograph which illustrated

the point they wished to make (see figure 12).

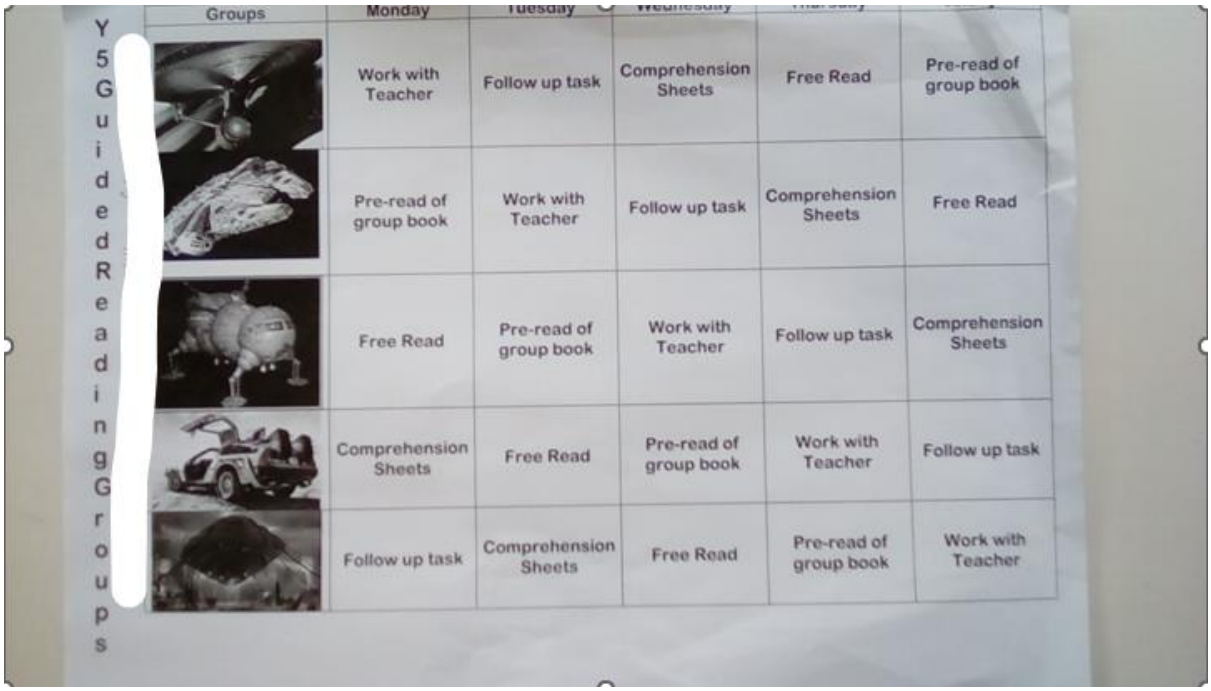


Figure 12 Guided reading timetable

Children also used the photographs as an opportunity to highlight areas of concern. Jim took a photograph of the boxes which contained the reading scheme books (see figure 13).

Figure 13 Staged reading boxes Key Stage 2 (Jim)

His comments about the image illustrated his frustration:

> JIM: Well, I don't really like it because people are not allowed to use the library, so not-- stage 16, there's not many good books because when I was on stage--

Once the photographer had made their point about the image, all members of the group were encouraged to enter into the discussion. I asked questions to probe further into the understanding of the particular topic. For example, Francis shared a photograph of the ‘staged boxes’ where the children selected books based on their reading ‘stage’ (see figure 14).

Figure 14 Staged reading boxes Key Stage 2 (Francis)

She shared the following information about the photograph she had taken:

> FRANCIS: Oh, that's me. So this one is to show that everyone is on a different stage. Some people can read better than others, but we celebrate everyone. So some people read stage 9, 10 and 11 books, and some people can read the big books. But we celebrate everyone because some people aren't as clever as others, but one day they'll get as good as everybody else.

Following this initial explanation, the rest of the group engaged in a discussion about ‘staged’ reading. This led to opinions being shared about the types of books included

in the ‘staged’ boxes compared to the library. Staged books were described as ‘scripted’ and ‘factual’ covering topics such as ‘weather’ and ‘electricity’ whereas the library contain books by established authors such as J.K. Rowling and Michael Morpurgo.

In addition to discussing the photographs, I also asked the groups the following questions:

- How would you describe reading in your school?
- How does reading make you feel?
- Is there anything you would like to change about reading in school? Your class?
- What reading is valued in school?

I hoped that these questions would help me to explore areas pertinent to the main research questions whilst also recognising that open-ended questions can help to ensure that the children could focus on areas that were of interest to them (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). I had to offer clarification regarding the final question and altered it to ‘What sort of reading do you think school thinks is important?’ as the term ‘value’ appeared to puzzle the children.

3.3.6.3 Teacher interview

Interviews with Mr Dickens were both informal and formal. During the research, I consulted him regarding views and opinions children had shared and provided feedback about how they understood reading in Amber class. These conversations usually happened at the end of the day and I made field notes to support my memory of what had been said. I also arrange a more formal interview with Mr Dickens

following the conclusion of the field work to provide an opportunity for him to respond to the initial findings (see section 3.4.3). This took place in October 2019 in Mr Dickens' classroom and was audio recorded.

3.3.7 Role of the researcher

In studies such as this, the role of the researcher is viewed as central. Relationships between the researcher and the researched can help to facilitate dialogue where understandings of the participant's viewpoints and situation are developed (Schwandt, 2001). They do not (as might be the case for a positivist researcher) try to 'limit' researcher effects in the hope that the children would begin to behave 'normally', revealing the "real' character" of the domain (Stoddart, 1986, p.108). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point to the centrality of the observer in qualitative research describing it as a "situated activity"; the researcher uses their representations of a setting, for example, field notes, interviews, photographs, etc. to interpret or make sense of "phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p.3).

The role of the researcher in ethnographic studies is continually constructed throughout the research (Goffman, 1955; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). In a study such as this, where visits were infrequent, the importance of finding a researcher role was accentuated (Brockmann, 2011) and I recognised the need to negotiate a role (Walford, 2009). At times I found that my role was as a 'colleague' discussing family life with Mr Dickens, switching to 'teacher' as children asked for help with their work. I will now outline my role in more detail recognising my own positionality in the study and the value of engaging reflexively with the data.

3.3.7.1 The investigator

As the purpose of this study was to understand how children experienced, felt and thought about reading in school, I felt that it would be helpful to give them the opportunity to share their views without fear of judgment. As such, I chose not to outline the details of my enthusiasm for reading. When Mr Dickens introduced me to the class, he explained that I wanted to find out about reading in school. He told the children that he was interested to know their opinions and that he would use their views to inform any changes he might make. This was useful as I was concerned that the children might avoid sharing views and opinions which they considered critical of the school and Mr Dickens.

The role of 'investigator' was helpful as it then seemed logical for me to sit with children and discuss their views of the tasks set by the teacher. However, as an adult in the classroom, I was aware that there would inevitably be a power imbalance between myself and the children (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). To address this, I sat at the children's desks and became involved in their work, attended assemblies and occasionally went outside during break time. The children were suspicious about my role at first and needed reassurance that I was not there to monitor what they were doing. To address this, I maintained my position sitting alongside and supporting their discussions and contributions. For example:

> Kerry has got some smelly scratch cards out of her tray. At first she hides them and looks at me, not sure if I can be trusted. I am eager to see what she has and smile. She passes one over – 'this is cherry'. 'Mmm, nice,' I say, sniffing it. We share the smelly scratch cards - I feel like I have been accepted!
>
> (9th November 2018 Field Notes)

Building a rapport with children and engaging in respectful conversations can help to reduce children's "inhibitions and desire to please" (Hill, 2005, p.63). However,

although an informal approach may help to lessen the authority image (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) the difference in status will remain in evidence (Mayall, 2008). My intention was to be viewed as an “acceptable marginal member” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.68) in relation to all audiences.

To avoid being viewed as a ‘teacher’ I chose my clothes carefully. What researchers wear can be influential in how they are perceived in the field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I generally wore casual clothes (jeans, t-shirt, trainers, Dr Marten boots) which would hopefully position me as a ‘non-teacher’ in comparison to staff members at Rainside school who dressed more professionally.

During the study, although I chose my ‘physical’ position in the classroom, I found that my actual ‘role’ was determined by the activities and events within the school environment. Children engaged with me to ask for help with tasks, to discuss aspects of school life or to share their work. My role remained fluid throughout the research but my general aim was to be the ‘least adult’ (Thorne, 1993). Gold (1958) distinguishes four possible roles for the participant observer: the complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and the complete observer. As outlined in section 3.3, ‘complete observer’ or ‘complete participant’ might relate to a positivist approach which attempts to minimise the influence of the researcher; this may effectively legitimise the concern of observer effects relating to how a researcher accounts for participant’s “improved behaviour” or “staged performances” (Monahan & Fisher, 2010, p.358). However, Monahan and Fisher argue that changes in participant’s behaviour should not necessarily be viewed negatively and are actually a possible source of information; “it is the ethnographer’s close proximity to and interaction with the informants … that affords the transformation of observer effects from distasteful bias to serendipitous boon”

(Monahan & Fisher, 2010, p.372). (See Appendix C for examples of staged incidents)

'Staged' incidents (Monahan & Fisher, 2010) would, from a positivist perspective, be viewed as tainted due to the engagement with the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). However, within the social constructionist paradigm, where meanings are viewed as constantly constructed and reconstructed through engagement and interaction, such events could be seen as insights into "how individuals perceive themselves and would like to be perceived" (Monahan & Fisher, 2010, p.363). This was particularly relevant in relation to the research questions regarding how children were positioned and what reading identities they felt were available to them.

3.3.7.2 Positionality

Positionality might be considered to be where an individual stands in relation to "the other" (Merriam et al., 2001, p.411). Although I was an 'outsider' in relation to the school and children, I felt somewhat of an 'insider' due to my relationship with Mr Dickens and my previous experience; as a former teacher, literacy consultant and author, I have a good understanding of research and pedagogies relating to reading for pleasure. My passion for listening to stories began at an early age (as described in section 1.2) and has continued throughout my life. I am also aware of research findings that point to academic judgements offered at eleven years old as a possible reason for children becoming disaffected learners (Hutchings, 2015).

I recognised that these subjectivities possibly influenced the focus of my attention during this study along with the notes I made and reflections I recorded. My own identity and subjectivities, combined with knowledge of relevant research, perhaps informed my view of data as they were generated, highlighting possible areas for

further investigation and providing me with a particular viewpoint. For example, during reading aloud sessions with Mr Dickens, I considered Joe's response and was interested to see whether he found the sessions enjoyable. I noted that:

> Joe stares at Mr Dickens as he reads. He shuffles out from under the table, closer still to Mr Dickens and sits cross-legged at his feet. Joe is clearly absorbed in the story.
>
> (Tuesday 2nd April 2019 Field Notes)

Considering my positionality throughout the research process and in relation to those involved can help to shape the study and findings and can be thought of as reflexivity.

3.3.7.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity allows the researcher to view their own positioning as a valuable tool in relation to research (Willis, P., 2013) suggesting that it is their responsibility to recognise that the interpretation of events will be influenced by their own experiences and background (Denscombe, 2017) and to consider the implications of this for their findings. Where "cultural and social reality is a human and textual construction" (Mantzoukas, 2012, p.429), validity is achieved by adopting a consistent and coherent approach to identifying, collecting and analysing data that reflects this position. Researchers adopt a self-reflexive approach taking account of personal histories and beliefs and their influence (Goodall, 2003). In what follows, I explore some of the ways in which my positionality was significant to the conduct of this study and to my findings.

Adopting a reflexive approach, with an appreciation of my role as an active participant, allowed me to interact directly with the children and to reflect on the significance of what I did in relation to what the children did. In a bid to co-construct

meaning where data are recognised as “a field of inferences in which hypothetical patterns can be identified and their validity tested” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.17). For example, I believe that it is important for children to be provided with time to read independently from self-selected texts. During the interviews, the children raised the issue of lack of time for individual reading. Although I had not introduced the topic, I was able to discuss this with them, identifying the reasons why independent reading was valued highly and comparing these to my own understanding of independent reading. My engagement with the children at this point leaned more towards my role as a teacher than as a researcher. This was a conscious choice in line with my ethical framework (see section 3.4.3) as I felt that I could draw on my expertise to support my understanding of the children’s concerns. My knowledge and understanding of reading also led me to offer suggestions and ideas.

Mr Dickens was keen to learn about the children’s responses in the interviews. I told him about the children’s preference for a book by David Walliams.

> I explained that the children generally expressed a liking for Walliams … He said he was going to read Walliams and see what happened.
>
> (10th December 2018 Field Notes - Reflection)

Following this discussion, Mr Dickens changed the class novel:

> Mr Dickens didn’t like David Walliams when I first started. I think my feedback from the children regarding their enjoyment of David Walliams must have influenced him to choose alternative reading aloud material.
>
> (8th March 2018 Field Notes - Reflection)

However, although David Walliams is a popular author (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018), his books have been criticised for including harmful stereotypes leading to the

removal of certain sections of text (Chilton, 2021). It would appear that the selection of texts for reading aloud is not straightforward (see section 6.2.3 for further discussion).

I also suggested a novel relating to the class's upcoming residential trip to Whitby - *Room 13* (Swindells, 2011) – and provided Mr Dickens with a copy. I reflected on Mr Dicken's decision to read Walliams and Swindells:

> I know Mr Dickens knows that I value reading aloud to children and he has added it to the timetable probably because of me. He has changed the content from something of his own taste to David Walliams earlier in the year. I know he doesn't like David Walliams. He once told me he starts sentences with 'And' which he clearly did not approve of! Today he is reading Room 13. I have loaned it to him as he has a class trip to Whitby soon and the book is about a school trip to Whitby. I'm not sure if Mr Dickens values reading aloud in the way I do. He reads to his own children but perhaps he doesn't see the benefit in reading aloud to quite capable Year 5 children?
>
> (2nd April 2019 Field Notes - Reflection)

Finally, during a reading lesson (20th March) I assisted Mr Dickens in preparing books for the forthcoming lesson. The lesson was designed to support children in selecting texts. Mr Dickens discussed the process of using the front cover, blurb and author to help children make good selections. The texts were then used to support the children in designing their own book cover for a story they had written and the texts selected were added to the class library for future reading (see figure 15).

Figure 15 Books selected for reading lesson in the library

Interventions such as these positioned me more as a teacher rather than a researcher. Using my knowledge and understanding of children's literature, I selected books that I viewed as interesting and suitable for children in the class. The information from the interviews helped me to understand that the children enjoyed a range of novels including those written by popular celebrity authors and picture books. I was able to shape this event so that their views and opinions were taken into consideration in the moment.

Reflexive field notes provided a detailed account of the events in the classroom and the reflection points helped me to develop an awareness of my positioning in the class as a researcher. I used the reflections to highlight potential themes as they emerged and consider how my own perspectives and actions may be shaping what is happening. For example, following a maths session I observed that children read books. However, many of them were not reading and held their books in 'reading

positions' whilst they chat (20th November 2018 Field Notes). I reflect on this as follows:

> Reflection – it is clearly good to be 'seen' to be reading but the children are not actually reading and would prefer to chat. Why is this? Are the books not interesting? What is their view of reading? Do they only read when they 'have' to and to simply hold the book in the right position is enough to keep the teacher off your back?
>
> (20th November 2018 Field Notes - Reflection)

Mr Dickens later used evidence of chatting such as this to support his decision to remove an independent reading session from the weekly timetable. It is interesting that rather than be disappointed that the children are not reading (as Mr Dickens was), I considered how children wanted to be seen as readers and the possible reasons for their behaviour.

I also became aware of how my interest in reading aloud may have framed aspects of my enquiry. For example, reading aloud was clearly not a priority and sessions were not timetabled. My reflection illustrates my disappointment:

> Reflection: I can't help but feel a little disappointed that Mr Dickens started the story at 3:20 when the children go home at 3:30. This is very little time to read a story. By the time the children have settled, there are only a few minutes of 'flow' where the children are immersed in the story experience. There is no opportunity for chat after the book.
>
> (8th March 2019 Field Notes - Reflection)

Reflections such as these helped me to consider the events in the classroom and illustrated how my own views and opinions were shaping my interpretations of these events.

3.4 Ethics

Morrow and Richards (1996) describe ethics as a set of "moral principles and rules of conduct" (p.1) and, according to Delamont (2017), there are three ethical issues

for ethnographers to consider: the regulations of organisations involved in the research, the safety and confidentiality of those being researched and the 'mental comfort' of the researcher. Each of these ethical issues was considered throughout this project.

3.4.1 Regulations of organisations

The ethics proposal provided details relating to consent, methods and methodology, data collection and analysis and was approved by the Faculty of Development and Society's Research Ethics Committee at Sheffield Hallam University (see Appendix D). As described in section 3.3.1, access to the research site was gained through Mr Dickens. Having identified Mr Dickens' class as a suitable research location, I needed to negotiate access through the formal gatekeeper – the head teacher. Mr Dickens consulted the head teacher who approved the research and I arranged for the study to take place from September 2018 to July 2019.

Parent/carer letters (see Appendix E) provided information about the purpose of the research and how the information would be recorded. However, although consent was gained from the main parents/carers, it could not be guaranteed that every parent/carer had received the information. Sieber (1992) suggests that this approach is acceptable due to the fact that it would be difficult to locate all parents/carers and that the research would not be detrimental to the children.

The purpose of the research was shared with staff members during a morning briefing (October 2018) and there was an opportunity to ask questions. I left written information and consent forms (see Appendix F) on the staffroom table for people to complete. Only the head teacher and Mr Dickens completed the form. When Mrs Barker (the supply teacher) taught in Amber class, she completed the form too.

All of the children in Amber class were provided with a brief outline of the research and consent form (see Appendix G) which they were asked to sign if they wished to take part.

3.4.2 Safety and confidentiality of participants

In relation to Article 12 of *The United Nations on the Rights of a Child* (UNICEF, 1989), the British Educational Research Association (BERA) states that children should be facilitated to give informed consent. Also, in the case of children "whose age, intellectual capacity or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to undertake their role" (British Educational Research Association, 2011, p.6), alternative ways should be explored to gain consent. As James, Jenks and Prout (1998) suggest, children are best placed to make judgements about themselves and their own lives.

The process of gaining informed consent from the children involved sharing information relating to the research procedures and purpose. During my visit to Amber class in October 2018, I described the research to the children informally and provided them with a written consent form to read and sign if they wished to be involved. The information was written in language suitable for children in this age group (See Appendix G). Although the form covered the main points of the research, the level of detail included could be described as providing shallow cover (partial explanation) rather than an explicit explanation (Gary & Sandstrom, 1988). I chose not to explain the research questions in detail and the possible implications for the construction of the children as readers. The omission of such detail could be questioned in relation to children who may have refused consent had they known the full extent of the research. However, I felt it was appropriate for two reasons. First, the extent of any ethnographic research is not fully known to the researcher at the

beginning of the process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Second, making explicit the suggestion that school-based literacy practices might affect how the children view themselves as readers may lead to questions about the appropriateness of the reading curriculum, subsequently undermining the authority of the teacher who has responsibility for delivering these statutory requirements.

When sharing research information with the class, I positioned myself in front of the children adopting a relaxed position and lowering myself to the children's level when necessary. Building a rapport with children and engaging in respectful conversations helps to reduce children's "inhibitions and desire to please" (Hill, 2005, p.63). I attempted to maintain eye contact to help lessen perceptions of myself as an authority figure (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) but recognised that there would always be a difference in status (Mayall, 2008).

I explained to the children that I would watch and record (both in note form and on audio recorders) their behaviour and conversations during lessons and at break times; their names would be changed when I wrote about what happened to ensure confidentiality. Children were required to indicate whether they wished to consent to the research by reading and signing a form. I am aware that some children may have signed as they wished to conform and please the researcher; as Hill (2005) points out, adults are "ascribed authority over children, who often find it difficult to dissent or disagree" (p.63). Also, it is questionable the extent to which the children knew what they were consenting to in terms of published papers, books, etc. Consent, therefore, was judged as ongoing with the option to review at any point in the study (Alderson, 2000; Connors & Stalker, 2007; Flewitt, R., 2005). I monitored the children's behaviour and considered their willingness to talk to me, assessing in the moment if they were happy to be included in the research.

There was some confusion regarding the form in the way that it was worded. The children were asked to tick ‘yes’ if they agreed that they had been informed about the research etc. They had all been informed about the research but some did not wish to participate. Rather than ticking ‘no’ (which appeared as an intuitive option if they did not wish to participate), I directed them to leave the form blank.

To ensure information about the children and school was confidential, I chose pseudonyms for each of the children taking part in the research along with the other adults and the school. I tried to use personal links with the children’s names to support my memory. For example, one girl had the same name as a close friend’s daughter so I used the mother’s name as her pseudonym and Mr Dickens was named after the author Charles Dickens, reflecting his love of adult fiction. The use of pseudonyms was included in the initial introduction to the project for the children:

> When I write about my time at our school I am going to change your names and the name of the school and class so that no one knows who said what or where your school is. I am doing that to make sure you are safe.
>
> (See Appendix F)

Additionally, on the consent form, children and adults who wished to participate were required to tick ‘yes’ to confirm that they had been made aware of how their information would be pseudonymised (see Appendix E, F and G)

Pseudonyms were used in all field notes and transcripts and photos were edited to ensure that there was no identifying information included. The children were aware of this process and during the research sometimes asked what their ‘other’ name was. There were requests to change the alternative name but I reassured them that it was not particularly important. I also thought it would be difficult to keep track of children in the class if names were altered frequently.

Some children who had consented to be part of the research themselves did not receive consent from their parents/carers. However, they were allowed to participate in the photo-elicitation interviews so that their views and opinions were heard. I explained that I would share these findings with Mr Dickens but that they would not form part of my study.

3.4.3 Mental comfort of the researcher

My researcher role would probably be viewed as an 'outsider' to the school (I did not work there). However, at times I felt like an 'insider in terms of my background as a teacher and my relationship with Mr Dickens. Researching friends and colleagues can be complicated (Brewis, 2014) and my relationship with Mr Dickens was not without its tensions.

As outlined in section 3.3.1, we had known each other for many years and I have great respect for him as a teacher. He has such enthusiasm for his role and children respond very positively to him. However, I recognise now that I made assumptions about the classroom practices and activities I might observe, believing that these would embrace approaches designed to promote reading for pleasure. It soon became clear that reading was not a priority. When I tried to make arrangements to visit the class to specifically observe reading activities, these were limited to guided reading. The focus in class was writing.

I worried that Mr Dickens felt somewhat judged by my requests to watch reading activities as this did not appear to be a priority for him and seemed to put him in a difficult position. He was aware of my enthusiasm for reading and I wondered if he felt somewhat conflicted. Reading levels in SATs were not a cause for concern in

school and it might have been difficult for Mr Dickens to justify any more time for reading activities.

The children in Amber class were quite critical of the approaches to reading. They made it clear that they were unhappy when the ‘free’ (independent) reading session was removed from the guided reading timetable and highlighted other areas they were dissatisfied with such as the limited choice of books and the length of reading aloud sessions. This knowledge, combined with my own passion for developing reading for pleasure, made me feel uncomfortable and I found this aspect of the research difficult to write about. I felt a moral obligation to write about the pupils’ experiences, feelings and thoughts in relation to reading and how I felt these positioned them as readers but I also felt loyalty to Mr Dickens as a colleague. I was grateful to him for agreeing to participate in the research and felt that he might find any critique of the approaches he used upsetting. Although an ethnographic approach appears suited to research into children’s experiences and opinions through direct involvement with participants within the school environment, this “human process”, whereby the researcher and members of the school community interact and share experiences, can lead to “feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in all parties” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.144).

I considered that Mr Dickens felt under pressure to achieve outcomes and, as such, delivered lessons to achieve these aims and was, as Ball (2003) suggests, a victim of a performative education system. Comber (2007) argues that researchers should develop a better understanding of the situation and factors influencing teachers’ decision-making and opinions by exploring ways of working with teachers. She suggests that when researchers encourage “reciprocal relationships” which position teachers as “knowers” and “investigators” research is more likely to lead to changes

that make a difference to children's learning. An approach that involves teachers, she believes, is better than approaches where researchers critique "teachers' practices without offering ways forward" (p.18). As such, I felt that it was important to discuss the findings of the research with Mr Dickens.

I arranged an interview with Mr Dickens in October 2019 so that I could share the children's views of schooled reading with him. Ethical approval was sought and gained from Sheffield Hallam University for this extension to the study (see Appendix H). This provided an opportunity for Mr Dickens to discuss the findings and perhaps outline reasons for certain decisions and approaches in his class. He talked positively about his intention to read aloud more regularly and suggested that 'free' or independent reading could be reinstated if children used the time to read rather than talk. Ultimately, however, classroom practice was influenced by time pressures and a focus on outcomes; because outcomes for reading were judged to be good, it lacked focus and, consequently, time:

> I just think it needs to be bigger. I think it needs to be more-- the problem is we've got that many plates are spinning. We've got to make maths a big focus. We've got to make this or that a big focus. The reading sort of-- we do all right at reading in terms of-- so it's not as important as some other areas. But I think that, so easily, it could become lost, and then it becomes an issue because you focussed on something else. That's the problem with teaching. You're spinning far too many plates, and when one thing drops, you focus all your energy on that. And then another thing starts to wobble, and then you've got to go back to that thing again. So you're always coming around to it. It's got to be something that can look after itself and that really, really works.
>
> (Interview transcript Mr Dickens October 2019)

This helped me to gain a better understanding of Mr Dickens' role and the dilemmas he faced as he navigated external expectations in a time-pressured environment. The fact that Mr Dickens is an enthusiastic reader really highlights the difficulties

faced by teachers in the classroom as they navigate their way through a myriad of external expectations whilst also attempting to incorporate values and beliefs of their own.

Reflecting on this conversation reminded me of my time as a teacher. I knew that when I was a primary teacher I too did not focus nearly enough on promoting reading for pleasure in my classroom. I had begun my career with such good intentions but, due to external pressures to achieve improved outcomes, opportunities for informal talk, reading independently and reading aloud were squeezed out.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have explained the methodology of the study and discussed ethical implications. The study was qualitative and used a combination of participatory and ethnographic approaches which allowed me to explore the children's experiences, feelings and thoughts in relation to reading.

I considered my initial entry into the field, exploring how direct engagement with the children encouraged the development of relationships built on mutual trust. I explained the use of photo-elicitation methods and outlined their value in challenging the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched. Such methods are also beneficial in terms of their ability to draw attention to the less visible aspects of school life; issues of importance for children which might not be accessible through field work alone.

Considering the possibility of 'observer effects' (Monahan & Fisher, 2010), I outlined the benefits of engaging directly with the children. Rather than assuming a neutral role in the study, I discussed my positionality and explained the value of adopting a reflexive approach, acknowledging my experiences and views.

The importance of ethics was considered and I outlined how I gained ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University. I provided details regarding the safety and confidentiality of the participants. Consent in this study was ongoing and I recognised my role in monitoring children's willingness to engage throughout the study. I highlighted areas of tension, such as my relationship with the teacher, Mr Dickens, and explained how a further interview provided an opportunity for him to discuss key areas of interest and explain the thinking behind key decisions such as the removal of independent reading.

Chapter 4 Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the use of thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) in the study. I will explain my use of a phased approach (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017) and will consider its strengths and weakness. This research was an 8-month qualitative study using ethnographic methods with a Year 5 classroom of 23 children that included participant observation and photo-elicitation interviews. I will outline how I worked with the different forms of data, leading to the themes: purpose of reading, time, choice and progress.

4.2 Thematic analysis

To gain an understanding of the children's experiences, feelings and thoughts in relation to reading, I chose to analyse the data using Clarke and Braun's approach to thematic analysis (TA) (2017). TA, according to Clarke and Braun (2017), is a widely used qualitative analytical method that aims to identify patterned meaning across a dataset with a 'theme' capturing "something important about the research question" (p.82).

Studies adopting an ethnographic stance accept research as a social process that necessarily involves the researcher within that process, rather than aiming to unearth untainted knowledge of the social world. In using TA in this study, therefore, I selected which aspects of the phenomena to focus upon and was also part of the social world being researched. As such, my findings cannot be viewed separately from myself and will always reflect elements of my biography along with reasons for the choices I made. Braun and Clarke (2018) refer to this as *reflexive* TA involving the "researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their

reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (p.594) rather than simply following set procedures.

The research process in this study, therefore, was one of construction rather than discovery, which rejected the notion of a single 'reality' in favour of multiple realities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This provided opportunities for the complexities of classroom life to be represented recognising that "knowledge is rarely, if ever, uncontested and certain" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.131). The challenge, in terms of data analysis, was to present findings that recognised the centrality of the researcher to the process and product, whilst also developing an understanding of the construction of the children as readers.

4.3 Phased approach to analysis

I will outline my approach to the analysis here. Although it would appear to follow a linear path, it should be recognised that this was a reflective and iterative process, where I continuously moved backwards and forwards between phases (Nowell et al., 2017). The table below provides a summary of each stage:

Data Analysis	
Phase 1 – Familiarisation with the data	Ongoing throughout study Use of 'Reflection' points during field work and following write-up of field notes Written reflections on audio recordings Transcriptions of audio recordings Cataloguing data Deductive analysis
Phase 2 – Generating initial codes	Inductive analysis Use of Post-it notes to label points of interest Outlining possible themes Line-by-line coding
Phase 3 – Searching for themes	Reviewing coding to generate themes Outlining possible themes

Phase 4 – Reviewing themes	Further coding of data Reviewing coding to generate and refine themes Outlining final themes
Phase 5 – Defining and Naming themes	Reflection on whole process Consideration of suitability of final themes
Phase 6 – Producing the report	Considering approach to analysis

Table 3 Summary of data analysis

4.3.1 Phase 1 - Familiarisation with the data

Analysis of data began at the start of the study and, through continuous engagement with the data, I was able to consider potential themes throughout the study. As I made field notes, took photographs and conducted interviews, I began to reflect on the data.

I recorded my field notes and reflections each evening following field work, adding extra information to the descriptions and reflecting in more detail regarding the events in the field. I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews shortly after they were conducted and made notes regarding my initial thoughts relating to what the children had said, highlighting key ideas in bold. This provided me with the opportunity to reflect on what had been said by the children and consider this in relation to field work as the study progressed.

Data from recordings were transcribed. I decided to use a transcription service for all audio recordings. Although transcribing audio recordings is helpful for a researcher in terms of familiarisation with the data (Riessman, 1993) and as an initial phase of data analysis (Bird, 2005), the time requirement is considerable and, in my situation, unmanageable. I found that by listening to the recordings and editing the transcripts simultaneously (for example, adding pseudonyms, corrections, etc.) I was able to further familiarise myself with the data.

All data were categorised into sections, for example, field notes, children's photographs, etc. This involved the creation of a cataloguing system to enable future referencing, for example, First interviews: A1, A2, etc., second interviews: B1, B2, etc.

The data generated were as follows:

Data	Amount	Further details
Field Notes and Reflections	56 pages	9th November 2018 to 4th June 2019
Photographs	285 images	Children's photographs: Interview 1 (Dec 2018) – 58 Interview 2 (June 2019) - 17
Audio recordings	4 hours 34 minutes	Interviews with children: Interview 1 (Dec 2018) – 3 hours 6 minutes Interview 2 (June 2019) – 39 minutes Interview with Mr Dickens: 23 minutes Recordings in classroom: 26 minutes
Observation	36 hours	Friday 9th November 2018 to Tuesday 4th June 2019

Table 4 Summary of data generated

Although the organisation of data might appear to be more of a functional procedure than a form of analysis, it provided a further opportunity to engage with data. As Braun and Clarke (2017) suggest, it is important to immerse oneself in the data prior to formal coding, recognising that initial thoughts and ideas about codes and potential themes should not be discounted.

A final step that might be considered a form of 'familiarisation' was to read the data in relation to the research questions. By re-reading the entire data set, I was able to formulate thoughts and ideas that might provide answers to the questions I had posed at the start of the research. This represented an initial step using 'deductive'

analysis (Boyatzis, 1998); a ‘theoretical’ approach which makes use of the researcher’s analytic interest.

4.3.2 Phase 2 – Generating initial codes

The next step was to code the dataset with codes being defined as “a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p.88). This, according to Tuckett (2005), is part of the analysis where data are organised into meaningful sections leading to the identification of themes that are usually broader. However, it can be difficult to ensure that the richness of the data is not lost during coding and this can prove problematic for the researcher (Bresnen, 1988). With this in mind, I coded in several stages recognising that each judgement, from the selection of data to code descriptions, is necessarily subjective; choices the researcher makes will influence the eventual choice of themes and conceptual analysis of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

At this point, I coded the dataset using an ‘inductive’ approach where there were strong links between the data and the identified themes (Patton, 1990). I used post-it notes to identify “initial codes” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p.88) which I believed represented what I considered to be interesting about the dataset.

‘Initial codes’ (Clarke & Braun, 2017) could be described as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.68). Such an approach may be associated with grounded theory (Glaser, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1997) where the researcher attempts to suspend judgement based on their own knowledge or theory allowing for codes and themes to be identified within the data i.e. themes become ‘data-driven’. For example:

Post-it	Code
Orange	Groups Whole class Choice of texts Benefits of whole class Carrie's war – boring More time with Mr Dickens Texts Whole class Whole class reading Benefits of whole class Children not concentrating

Table 5 post-it coding

(It is useful to note that throughout the analysis, I used colours to reflect which aspect of data I was referring to: Black – first interviews, Red – field notes, Blue – second interviews, Green – photos.)

As previously mentioned, Clarke and Braun (2017) highlight that those opportunities to consider themes at an early stage should not be ignored. Using these initial codes, I recorded 'potential' themes. For example, purple post-it notes focused on book types, choice and making progress which suggested the theme of 'stages':

Post-it	Code	Potential theme
Purple	Picture books Stages – 1-16/16+ Improving Types of books Schemes boring Limited choices Prevent free choice Being Stuck Start a revolution Linear path Picture books Picture books	Stages

Table 6 Example of Post-it coding and potential themes

The potential themes at this stage were:

Reading for writing
Identity
Reading for Pleasure
Billy and Joe
Guided reading
Comprehension
Social
Communication
Learning
Testing
Stages
Emotion

Table 7 Potential themes

I revisited the data and coded in more detail using utterance-by-utterance coding. This was useful as it led me to engage with the data in more depth (see table 9).

ELLEN: 15:10	Once I read with Mr Dickens, he just said, "Oh, this is improving because if you like expressions-- because what makes you move is where you're really confident and your expressions and you've-- how do I say it? What's the word? Where you improve.	Cara Doxey: explanation of moving from stage 15 to stage 16
INTERVIEWER: 15:32	Yeah?	
ELLEN: 15:32	Yeah, and he says, "Ooh, you've improved," and he says, "Ooh, just for a treat that you've moved, you can move up a stage." So basically--	Cara Doxey: moving up the stages
RUBY: 15:42	You can move up a stage, and I've moved up all the stages. I'm so close to being on stage 16. And what you do is you have stage 11, stage 12, stage 13, stage 14, stage 15--	
ELLEN: 15:55	All the way up to 16.	Cara Doxey: I'm close to stage 16
RUBY: 15:57	--all the way up to 16, then you can read any book. So say, if I was on stage 16, I could read this book.	
INTERVIEWER: 16:02	And what are these books like, then?	
ELLEN: 16:06	They are World War II--	Cara Doxey: Stage 16 and being a free reader
RUBY: 16:06	These books--	
INTERVIEWER:	What stage are they?	

Table 8 Line-by-line coding

4.3.3 Phase 3 – Searching for themes

Working with the 'potential' themes from the previous phase, I used the codes generated from line-by-line coding in an iterative process to consider these themes in more depth and to identify new themes. This process of revisiting the data in different ways allowed for 'deep thinking'. The process of determining themes involves interpretative analysis and, as Stake (1995) acknowledges, the process can appear somewhat of a "mystery" where "understanding creeps forward" as a result of

“reading and rereading the accounts” and “deep thinking” (p.73). This represents part of the analysis where researchers look for patterns, building a “logical chain of evidence” and making “conceptual/theoretical coherence” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp.245-246).

4.3.4 Phase 4 - Reviewing themes

Once themes had been identified, I reviewed to what extent these reflected the data and answered the research questions. I observed that some themes were simply “collection pots” containing everything the children had said about a particular practice, for example, ‘reading aloud’, rather than a “key character(s) in the story we are telling about the data” (Clarke & Braun, 2018, p.108).

Returning to phase 3, I engaged with the whole data set again and reviewed the analysis so far. I aimed to identify themes at a latent level. This process involved interpreting the content of the data for “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p.84) with final themes already being theorised rather than simply descriptive (semantic level analysis). This approach is more suited to research within a constructionist framework where viewpoints, understandings and experiences are socially produced and reproduced as opposed to residing in individuals (Burr, 2015). Certain themes collapsed into others with some themes becoming redundant. As Braun and Clarke (2017) point out, thematic analysis is an organic process and it is to be expected that codes and themes will be altered and deleted as the researcher strives to ensure that the key messages are reflected. The themes identified at this stage were Purpose, Time, Choice and Progress.

4.3.5 Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes

It is possible to continue coding indefinitely and the decision to stop is difficult (King, 2004). However, considering the extensive engagement with the data, I felt that the themes at this point were appropriate in that they addressed the research questions and reflected the aspects of reading that were important to the children. They each provided a "core concept" (Clarke & Braun, 2018, p.108). The table below provides a definition for each theme, outlining links to children's experiences, feelings and thoughts raised in the interviews:

Themes created following a shift in focus to children's perspectives		
Themes	Definition	Details
Purpose:	why the children read and with what outcome	- pleasure - life chances - exam success - learning - intelligence
Time:	how time is allocated to reading practices, by whom and with what outcome	- free reading - reading aloud - comprehension - writing v reading - reading for pleasure
Choice:	how the opportunity to choose texts is affected by ability, reading practice and availability	- Teacher selections - Staged reading - Free readers - Library selections - Value of texts - Reading for pleasure
Progress:	how progress influences the views of children in relation to what types of reading and texts are valuable	- Linear path - Staged reading - Reader response - Value of texts

Table 9 Final Themes

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed my approach to analysis. Data were analysed using reflective thematic analysis. I described the process of analysis in detail and my role in relation to the development of themes. The five phases of the process were outlined and discussed in relation to the data. The themes of purpose, time, choice and progress were identified and I will discuss these in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will draw on the analysis of the interviews with the children, field notes, photographs and interviews with the teacher, Mr Dickens, to discuss the themes of purpose, time, choice and progress. The children's understanding of the purpose of reading links both to schooled reading and reading at home, with reading away from school being considered more pleasurable. The four themes help to highlight how children in Amber class were positioned through the reading activities in school and their significance in relation to the children's developing reading identities. I begin with the purpose of reading.

5.2 The purpose of reading

5.2.1 Introduction

In this section I draw on my analysis to explore the theme of 'the purpose of reading': what it is and why it is important. This section draws mainly on data generated at the end of the interviews when I asked the children the following questions:

- How would you describe reading in your school?
- How does reading make you feel?
- Is there anything you would like to change about reading in school? Your class?
- What reading is valued in school? (or What sort of reading do you think the school thinks is important?)

Reading at school and home appeared to have different purposes so it would seem useful to begin with this theme as it helps to contextualise the themes of time, choice

and progress. I will begin by considering the children's experiences, thoughts and feelings about reading in relation to their future.

5.2.2 Future

In the children's interviews, the purpose of reading in school was considered to be good educational outcomes and future employment prospects; those who read well would achieve better exam results, employment opportunities and the chance to lead a 'good life' (Ben). Reading was considered an enabling factor in relation to jobs such as English teacher, author and musician; achieving better exam results would lead to increased employment opportunities with a good income. Billy told me that 'when you read, your future's better and you might get a better job'. He went on to explain that 'if you get money from your job, you get more places to go on holiday'. Jim stated that it was 'important' to read in Years 5 and 6 as this would lead to 'greater depths' and better performance in secondary school. It is interesting to note that he used the language of SATs and aligned himself to schooled reading expectations; children who are judged to be exceeding expectations at Year 6 are described as 'working at greater depth' (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018). Similarly, Billy believed Mr Dickens' view of reading was that it helped children perform well in exams. Ellen explained that the school wanted children to read as this helped with 'learning'.

The outcomes for those children who did not read well were highlighted. Janine thought that they would 'struggle with a lot in the future'. David linked reading skills with intelligence, stating that 'if people don't read, then they won't be very smart. And they won't get a very good job'. Billy agreed, suggesting that, 'If you don't know how to read, you've got no future'. Further implications of poor reading included

homelessness, prison and the probability that ‘people think you’re stupid’ (Flo). As Billy pointed out:

> [R]eading can save you from maybe even jail because if you see a disabled parking place, but you can't read that it says disabled and you park your car there, you might get a ticket or a fine.

Reading was also linked to better writing skills. These too, were associated with better employment prospects by Joe:

> Because reading helps you in life. If you can't read, you can't really get a job. And reading helps you write, and if you can't write, you can't really do it.

It is interesting to note that these were all long-term aims related to their future lives as adults with little reference to the immediate experience of reading in school and the purpose of reading in their everyday lives. The children seemed to perceive that there was an expectation to achieve positive outcomes in reading and education which would enable them to make the most of the material offerings of the social world.

Their responses appear to reflect the neoliberal discourses of individual responsibilities and performativity (Jaeger, 2017). The importance of reading in relation to future life chances seemed to put pressure on the children to develop a successful reading identity, as judged by their success in schooled reading practices. The purpose of reading was also linked to knowing the meaning of words.

Ruby suggested that the purpose of reading was ‘to help you understand what words mean’ and Jim believed that it was to ‘understand the meanings of words, use different words and get a lot of knowledge’. Kerry explained that dictionaries held the meaning of all words. The possibility that a word was not in the dictionary, yet still used in everyday life, was a point of consternation for Kerry, Daisy and Tulip. They

discussed the word ‘supercalifragilisticexpialidocious’ and considered its value as a ‘real’ word with its own meaning and how these factors were linked:

> KERRY: Yeah? You'd try to find it, wouldn't be able to find it. It's like, "Why does everyone always say supercalifragilisticexpialidocious?" It's not even a word. It's not in the dictionary. It's not a word.
>
> INTERVIEWER: It's not a word?
>
> KERRY: Because you've read through it.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Is it a word, though?
>
> TULIP: It is a word--
>
> KERRY: Yeah, it is a word--
>
> DAISY: It's a song.
>
> KERRY: --but it doesn't mean anything.
>
> INTERVIEWER: What do you think it means?
>
> KERRY: A song.
>
> TULIP: I think it might mean it's super.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Yeah?
>
> TULIP: Because it says supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.
>
> INTERVIEWER: What do you think it means?
>
> KERRY: It might be super. Like it's super and then it's--
>
> TULIP: [inaudible].
>
> DAISY: I can't say it broken down. Super-cali-fragi-listic-expi-ali-docious--
>
> KERRY: I think that it's super because-- I think it means super, amazing, and awesome because supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.
>
> INTERVIEWER: So because you've given it a meaning, do you think it's a word?
>
> DAISY: No.
>
> KERRY: Yeah. No, no. Not really.
>
> DAISY: I don't know.

> KERRY: If it's got a meaning of a certain word-- that don't mean-- if it links to a word, that still doesn't mean that it's a word.

This discussion is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the children appeared confused as the word undermined their belief that for words to exist, they must be included in the dictionary. Secondly, although meaning was attached to the word based on associations with 'real' words (for example, super) they remained puzzled as to whether this permitted the word to be 'real' or not. The children's assumption that words have definite meanings leaves little room for interpretation on the part of the reader. They made no reference to the value of context and they seemed to lack confidence in their own opinions and judgements.

This comment seemed to align with Rosenblatt's efferent (1986) reading where the children viewed the text as powerful and a source of factual answers. The role of the reader in such a transaction appeared absent (Rosenblatt, 1978).

5.2.3 Pleasure

Positive attitudes towards reading were discussed in the interviews and seemed to be associated with reading at home or reading books from home during school time. The purpose of reading at home appeared to be linked with pleasure and literacy as a social practice. Although the intended focus of the study was schooled reading, the children chose to discuss this aspect of reading and it provided a point of contrast with how they viewed reading in school. For example, when discussing how reading made them feel, they described a range of emotions such as 'happy' (Molly), 'relaxed' (Charlotte) and 'thrilled' (Francis) and suggested their personal response would depend on the author. Janine described the emotions involved and how they related to types of text:

> Reading makes you feel happy. And it can make you feel sad at the same time though, because if you're reading a sad book, it might make you feel sad. And if you're reading a scary book, you might feel scared. And if you're reading an adventure book, you might feel intense.

Danny and Ben spoke positively about reading. They both enjoyed David Walliams' books and owned personal copies of *Ice Monster* (2018). They described their physical responses to books and used their bodies to illustrate how they might feel:

> DANNY: Some books make me feel nice because it's about people's feelings and stuff and how they feel.
>
> BEN: But then horror books, they make me-- like that.
>
> INTERVIEWER: What do you mean, "Like that," when you sort of tense your body? What does that mean?
>
> BEN: Getting ready for something to happen, like in the book.

Tulip linked her pleasure in reading with a visit from her friend and Billy explained how reading 'takes [him] away' to the extent that he wouldn't realise if the house had burnt down. Charlotte elaborated on her association of reading with relaxation by explaining reading in her bedroom:

> It just makes me feel really relaxed. And, say, if you've been a bit hyper, say, if you've been doing, in particular, sports, then normally I would go and sit on my bed and sit on all my pillows, and I'd just normally read a book. And at the moment, I'm reading the play script of Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, and I've just gone on to part two.

These comments illustrate an awareness of reading as a pleasurable act and relate to the benefits outlined by *The Reading Agency* (2015) (see section 2.1.4 for more detail). When discussing 'home' reading, the children appeared to highlight the *experience* of reading describing how their body contorts in response to the text, the feeling of being 'in' the adventure and also the relaxing nature of reading, for example, Charlotte reading on her bed, Tulip seeing herself as part of the adventure

and Ben tensing his body in response to the text. This could be thought of as *aesthetic* reading (Rosenblatt, 1986) which focuses on the role of the reader in the experience.

The consideration of pleasure as the purpose of reading could perhaps be influenced by the children's options in terms of when, where and what to read. Having agency in these areas can support an understanding of reading as a pleasurable experience (Cremin, T. et al., 2014)

5.2.4 Summary

It would seem that, for these children, reading for pleasure had stronger links to reading away from school whereas schooled reading seemed to be related to facts and knowledge. Success in schooled reading appeared to be associated with improved life chances; those who were not successful may face financial and personal difficulties. The distinction between the two is helpful when considering the children's views of schooled reading in more detail. I will now explore the theme of choice.

5.3 Choice

5.3.1 Introduction

Reading choices in Amber class were made by both the children and teachers. The choices available to the children were all physical books and included both fiction and non-fiction. These were located in the staged reading boxes, the school library, the Year 5 and 6 bookshelves and the class library (see section 3.3.4). Access to these books depended mainly on a child's ability to decode. Texts for guided reading and reading aloud were also physical books and were selected by the teacher. Children also had the option to read texts from home in the gaps between official timetabled activities.

I will begin by discussing the books available to the children and explore how they navigated these options, considering the relevance of the materials and activities.

5.3.2 Children's choices

Having choice in reading was raised as an important factor during some of the interviews and the impact of staged reading appeared significant. Being able to choose which text to read is influential in many ways; it is linked to motivation and the development of positive attitudes in reading (Cremin, T. et al., 2014; Pressley, 2003; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021). Joe, for example, commented that 'it's nice to have choice' while Felicity noted it is better to have choice '[r]ather than being forced to do a stupid book that no-one wants to do' (Felicity).

As already mentioned, the children's options for book choices depended on their reading stage. '16-plus' and 'free' readers were able to choose two books each from the school library; 16-plus readers were limited to certain shelves and 'free' readers were given 'free' choice. Staged readers were allowed to choose two books from

their particular staged allocation, although they were allowed to choose a book from the library on the day when they were ‘free’ reading as part of the timetable of guided reading activities.

Children who discussed reading books from the staged boxes seemed keen to become a ‘free’ reader so that they could access the books in the library. Billy described the process as ‘good’ as he believed that children should ‘work to get the good books’. Joe, who read from the stage 12 box, explained that he ‘want[ed] to go through the stages’ so that he had greater choice:

> There are a lot of interesting books in there. Right now, there's two books I really want, but I know I can only take one … Because I'm a stage 12, and I have to be in stage 16 plus.

I later spoke to Mr Dickens about Joe’s frustration at not being about to select a particular book (*James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl* (2007b)) and Mr Dickens instructed Joe to collect the book from the library. This intervention provided Joe with the text he wanted on this occasion whereas normally staged readers would be limited to just one book from the library during the weekly ‘free’ reading activity.

When discussing reading from the staged boxes, some children appeared to recognise the perceived need to practise their skills and accepted the individual responsibility in terms of making progress. As Joe suggested, the ‘only thing I can do about [achieving stage 16-plus] is read, read, read, read, read’. It was also considered important to read a book from the correct stage and that this would support their progress as readers. However, this appeared to have a limiting effect. As Ben pointed out, ‘they organise it to give you a book what you can read’ and it would ‘not be very good’ to read a ‘hard book’ if you are not ‘a very good reader’ (David). This supports the notion that, for children to engage in reading, it is

important to restrict choices to books that match children's decoding ability (Clay, 1991). This approach, however, appeared to overlook children's interests and preferences.

Considering the importance that the school and children attached to practising reading skills, of particular concern were the children's negative views of the staged books. There appeared to be a lack of books and the breadth of choice seemed limited. Words such as 'babyish' (Jim) and 'boring' (Charles) were used to describe the selections. Charles suggested that the staged books were 'thin' and of 'low content' and did not last very long and contained 'scripted books' such as plays and non-fiction (Francis) covering topics such as 'weather', 'electricity' and 'forces' (Charlotte). There was also a problem of 'quantity' raised by Jim who told me that there were 'no' books in the stage 15 box and that in 'most of the boxes they're only two or three books'.

The photographs of the books in stage 8 to 15 boxes supported the children's perceptions of the staged choices with titles such as *John Newton* and *Children at War* along with traditional stories such as *Robin Hood* and the *Sheriff and Beowulf Grendel and the Dragon* (see figures 16 and 17).

Figure 16 Stage books

Figure 17 Stage books

Most of the books were part of *The Treetops Scheme* (Oxford University Press, n.d.) and had assigned levels clearly marked on the back but there were other materials available including books from other schemes and some non-scheme material such as Anne Fine's *How to write really badly* (2011) and Michael Morpurgo's *Conker* (1998) (see figure 18).

Figure 18 Stage books

Although the range was greater than suggested by the children in terms of content, the number of books in each box was severely limited. Several boxes had less than five books with two boxes having only one book. This narrow range of books available in the staged boxes seemed to limit the children's opportunities to exercise choice in reading, possibly leading to a negative impact on their enthusiasm for reading. The lack of control experienced by children who read from the staged boxes was clear.

> CHARLES: 15's quite bland.
>
> JIM: --10 to 15, there's not many books to choose from.

The lack of books appeared to cause a degree of frustration and Jim suggested that this was perhaps the reason for his lack of progress.

> INTERVIEWER: Right, and how do you get to be a good reader or move along?
>
> CHARLES: You read more books and you learn from that knowledge.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Right. But if there aren't any books in the box.
>
> CHARLES: You can't really move up.
>
> INTERVIEWER: That's a bit of a struggle, isn't it, that?
>
> JIM: You get stuck when you move-- you get stuck on your reading. It gets harder if you've not got any books to read.

To navigate the issue of choice, Charles and David explained that if there were no books in the staged box, they would take books from the library. Jim supported this action by suggesting that he might take some books from the library and put them in the boxes.

The level of dissatisfaction with staged books and their unauthorised use of the library may be evidence of the children's resistance to their assigned level. Charles, David and Jim apportioned blame for their staged position to the limited range of books and also implied that they were capable of reading library books. This is similar to Kontovourki's (2012) findings where children 'sneaked out' chapter books in a bid to prove their higher reading ability.

Given the importance of choice in relation to developing reading for pleasure (as explored in section 2.1.4), the reduced options available to staged readers appeared to limit the children's opportunities to develop as readers; not only did it prevent them from selecting suitable books to read based on their personal interests, but it also prevented them from developing skills such as browsing and learning about their preferences for particular genres or authors.

Children who had achieved 'free' reader status were able to choose books from the library; a large room with shelves filled with fiction and non-fiction books. When I

asked the children if the books in the library were different from the books in the staged boxes, Molly answered, '[d]efinitely'. The library books are 'longer' explained Francis and included authors and books such as '*Judy Moody*, *Harry Potter'* and '*Born to Run'* (Francis). However, views regarding the library selections were mixed.

The books in the library were described as 'old' (Francis) and 'boring' (David) and Francis suggested that newer ones should be made available 'like *Demon Dentist* (Walliams & Ross, 2016) and *Ratburger* (Walliams & Ross, 2012) and *Grandpa's Great Escape*' (Walliams, 2015). David Walliams was popular with many of the children and they were frustrated by the lack of his books in the library, as Kerry explained:

> KERRY: [I]n Year 4, we all wanted David Walliams' books to read, but then, it was like, 'I'm going to look in the library for a David Walliams one', but there was only *Boy in a Dress*.

This seemed particularly pertinent as a series of three, large display boards shared information about three famous authors and their books: David Walliams, Jacqueline Wilson and Michael Morpurgo (see figures 19, 20 and 21).

Figure 19 School library display - David Walliams

Figure 20 School library display - Jacqueline Wilson

Figure 21 School library display - Michael Morpurgo

It is also interesting to note the limited range of authors evidenced in displays and reflected in children's conversations. This echoes findings from research which state that only 48% of primary teachers could name 6 or more authors with the most popular three being Roald Dahl, Michael Morpurgo and Jacqueline Wilson (Cremin, T., Mottram, Bearne, & Goodwin, 2008).

Another display showed images relating to authors and books: Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (2007b) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2007a), Julia Donaldson's *Room on the Broom* (2010), A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (2022) and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (2014) (see figures 22 and 23).

Figure 22 School library - artwork

Figure 23 School library - artwork

As Felicity pointed out, '[t]hey have all those on the wall, but they don't have any of the books'.

In response to the lack of books by popular authors in the library, children supported their reading in school with books from home. 'I bring a book in from home sometimes,' explained Felicity, 'because the books in the library, I don't want to read, so I just bring one that I bought at home'. Francis agreed and suggested that books from home could promote greater choice as 'you can go to a shop and get the ones that you've seen and wanted'. However, the option of using books from home is

perhaps not available to everyone due to financial implications. Additionally, the option to bring a ‘book’ to school does not necessarily support readers who might enjoy other texts such as comics, magazines, online reading, and so on.

Although the children were frustrated by the choices available to them (some of the books did appear rather out of date, for example, Enid Blyton’s *The Naughtiest Girl in School* (2020) first published in 1940) the options available in the library were, perhaps, more varied than the children suggested. In preparation for the ‘library session’, Mr Dickens and I placed a selection of books from the library shelves on the floor for children to look at. These included Roald Dahl’s *The Twits* (2016), Robert Westall’s *Blitz Cat* (2002), Anthony Browne’s *Zoo* (1994), Eoin Colfer’s *The Worst Boy in the World* (2008), Jacqueline Wilson’s *Suitcase Kid* (1993) and Shaun Tan’s *Lost Thing* (2008) (see figures 24, 25 and 26).

Figure 24 Library session - selected texts

Figure 25 Library session - selected texts

Figure 26 Library session - selected texts

It is fair to say that some of these books might not be described as current, however, the literature is written by a range of established authors. The difficulties experienced by the children, therefore, might be more to do with their knowledge of children's fiction and authors. Reflecting findings in other research (Cremin, T., Mottram, Bearne, & Goodwin, 2008; Cremin, Bearne, Mottram, & Goodwin, 2008), the authors mentioned in the interviews were mostly limited to David Walliams, JK Rowling, Roald Dahl and Jacqueline Wilson.

Navigating the library system and the choice of texts available also seemed to be an issue. Ellen appeared unfamiliar with the system of alphabetical order by author's surnames, suggesting that 'if you have a C, and you had *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, you'd probably put it there'. Felicity seemed to struggle to locate the right text:

> I think it's hard to find a good one because I changed my book three times last week and I still didn't find a book that I personally liked.

Being able to select the right book is an important part of a child's reading identity. As Mackey, M. (2014) suggests, "a reader likely to keep on reading for the pleasure of it, knows how to find something satisfying to read", however, "this skill is often not taught in schools" (p. 521). The library session provided an opportunity to consider their selections.

The library session helped children to learn how to choose texts. They discussed selections and were provided with the chance to swap books as they refined their choice. Mr Dickens talked about making selections based on the author, picture and blurb. Listening to the children, it would appear that some chose texts based on a personal connection. For example,

> I chose *Here come the aliens* because I'm an alien
>
> I chose *Whitby witches* because I'm a witch
>
> Billy suggests that his selection of *The Twits* relates to his mum and dad – 'Where are your football boots?' – they're cross at him all the time.
>
> Reflection: It is interesting how the children talk about the books and try to find something which relates to an aspect of their lives whether it is real or imaginary. Having that link seems to make the book 'theirs' and different from the rest. (20th March 2019 Field Notes)

Once the children had selected a text, they were asked to design a book cover of their own for their recently written story using the library book as a guide or for inspiration. Their personal connection with the text was also evident in this part of the session. For example, Ellen's selection reminded her of her pet.

> The book she ([Ellen) has chosen from the library is about gerbils – she has got a gerbil at home. She says her mum and dad made her cry last night because they said she couldn't have another gerbil for Charlie as it would fight. (20th March 2019 Field Notes)

Joe was particularly excited by the activity and the following field notes illustrate how he used his knowledge of cartoons to develop his book cover:

> Joe is very enthusiastic about this task. He has not stopped working. He is busy designing his cover. Mr Dickens has given Joe the book cover that he has made which has probably helped to get Joe started. He has designed a really detailed cover.
>
> Joe takes his draft to show Mr Dickens. Mr Dickens is amazed! He awards Joe one dojo. Joe comes back to his seat and shows me his cover. I ask him if Mr Dickens liked it – he says 'he loved it!'. Joe is glowing with pride. Joe describes all of the details of his book cover to me. There are three little strawberries – because he loves strawberry jam. (20th March 2019 Field Notes)

Joe's excitement was also evident in a later visit as he continued to develop his book cover. It would seem that he had developed the cover to include characters that excited him rather than ones included in his story, as directed by Mr Dickens.

> I look at Joe's. We worked on this last time I was in school. I comment on the venus fly trap. He tells me that there's a much bigger one on the front. He turns the book cover over and shows me the front. 'And also, the dog is now a cat – it's Garfield. And the man is John Arbuckle. I like Garfield. He's cross though, like he's just seen Oti.
>
> Joe draws on his cultural knowledge of cartoons. He has placed these characters into a book cover which should represent a story written by themselves. I'm guessing his story

> doesn't have Garfield in it but as his drawing developed, he began to see other characters emerge and included ideas that excited him. (2nd April 2019 Field Notes)

Joe's engagement during this activity was different from his usual approach to more formal and routine reading activities in Amber class. For example, I observed Joe during a guided reading session which involved children taking turns reading aloud and answering questions about a teacher-selected text, *The Demon Headmaster* (Cross, 2017). I noted that Joe 'uses his book to play with. He rolls it and generally plays with it. He has not read any of the story' (20th November 2018 Field Notes). During a different guided reading session, Joe was required to read the book *Graveyard* by Neil Gaiman. I observe that 'Joe is wandering around his table. He is carrying a graveyard book and having little chats with people on his table' (4th February 2019 Field Notes). Joe confirmed this lack of interest when I asked him what he thought about reading in school during his interview, suggesting that it made him feel like going to sleep.

> JOE: It's just not very interesting, I guess. I mean, normally, I'm doing something else.
>
> INTERVIEWER: It's like a going-to-sleep position, that. Isn't it [laughter]?

However, in the library session, Joe experienced control and autonomy (Monteiro, 2013) in relation to the task and text and was able to draw on his knowledge of and enthusiasm for cartoons. There was time for discussion and an opportunity to develop his ideas over an extended period. The recognition of his abilities, interests and expertise seemed to help make the task meaningful for Joe (McTavish et al., 2012).

The interviews with Joe also revealed him to be an enthusiastic and knowledgeable reader. He told me that he had read all of Cressida Cowell's *How to train your*

dragon series at home and that he wished the library had more adventure books, in particular books by David Walliams. He valued the opportunity to read independently and choose a book from the library. He told me that the reading activities in Amber class affected his mood; when it was ‘normal work, I'm like, "Whoa". On ‘free’ reading, like, "Yay"’. Joe enjoyed being able to read freely from a self-selected text which he described as better than ‘having to read a certain book and write and work and write’. He suggested that if he were ‘boss of school, school every day would just be either reading or playing’.

More formal reading activities where children are positioned passively and tasks lack relevance can lead to children being viewed as disengaged or lacking motivation; their reading identity is effectively chosen by the teacher (Alvermann, 2001). However, those same children may display positive attitudes to reading when activities have relevance and they have an opportunity to exercise agency (Triplett, 2007). Joe’s engagement in the library session task encouraged him to feel pride in his work and offered him an opportunity for success.

A final point about choice relates to the organisation of the reading materials. During the academic year, new shelving was installed; it was brightly coloured and books were organised according to the genre (see figures 27, 28 and 29). Some children spoke positively about this change. Sarah told me that:

> [t]here's a fantasy section. There's an adventure section, stuff like that. And it tells you where all the books are in a section.

Figure 27 New shelving in school library

Figure 28 New shelving in school library

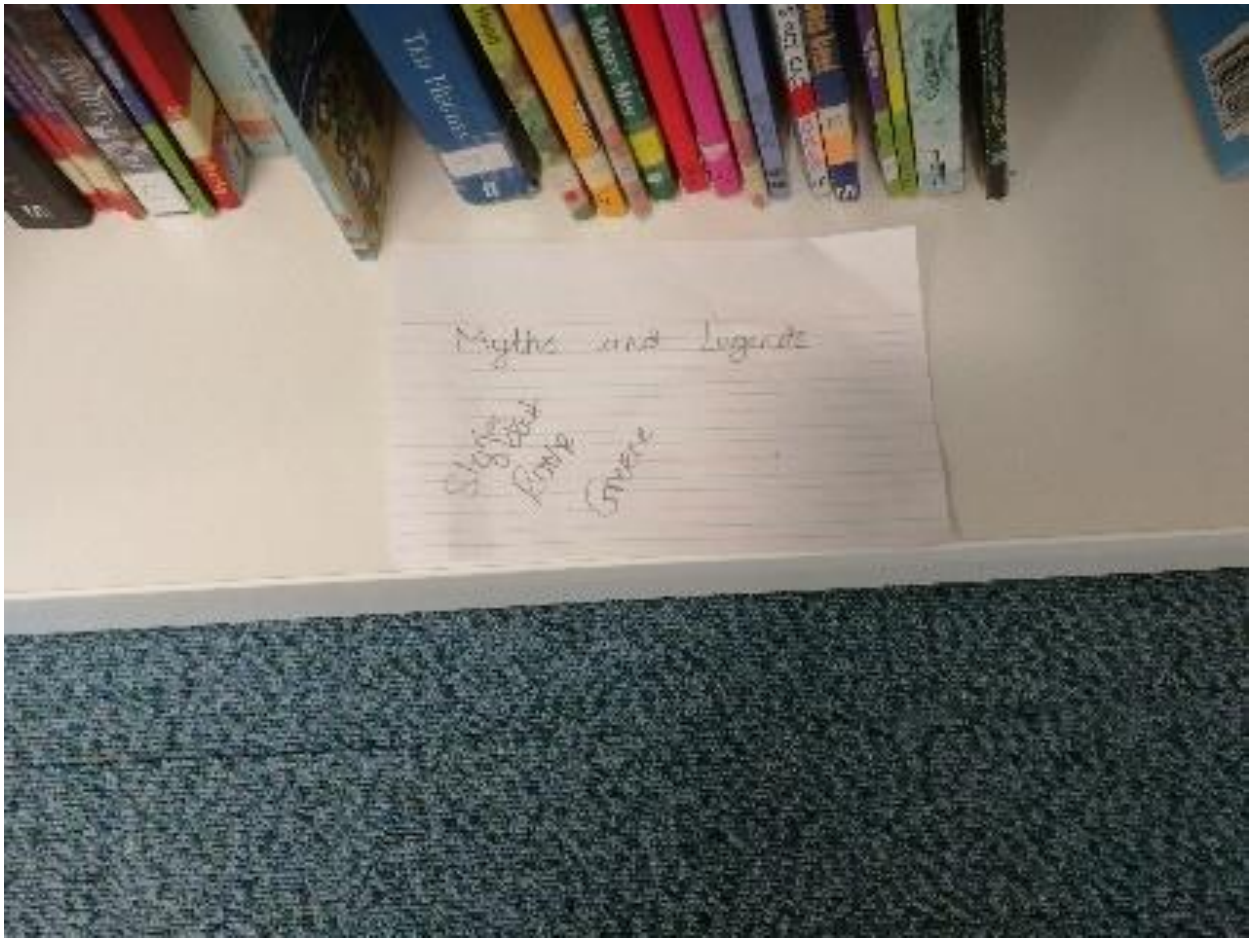


Figure 29 School library - ideas for genres

However, Billy and Ben were less impressed. Although they commented on the new shelving in their second interview, they said that this would have little impact on their enjoyment of the library because, as Ben pointed out, '[i]t's the same thing'.

The introduction of a classroom library also increased the choices available to the children in Amber class. In the second set of interviews, Joe took the following photograph in preparation for the interview:

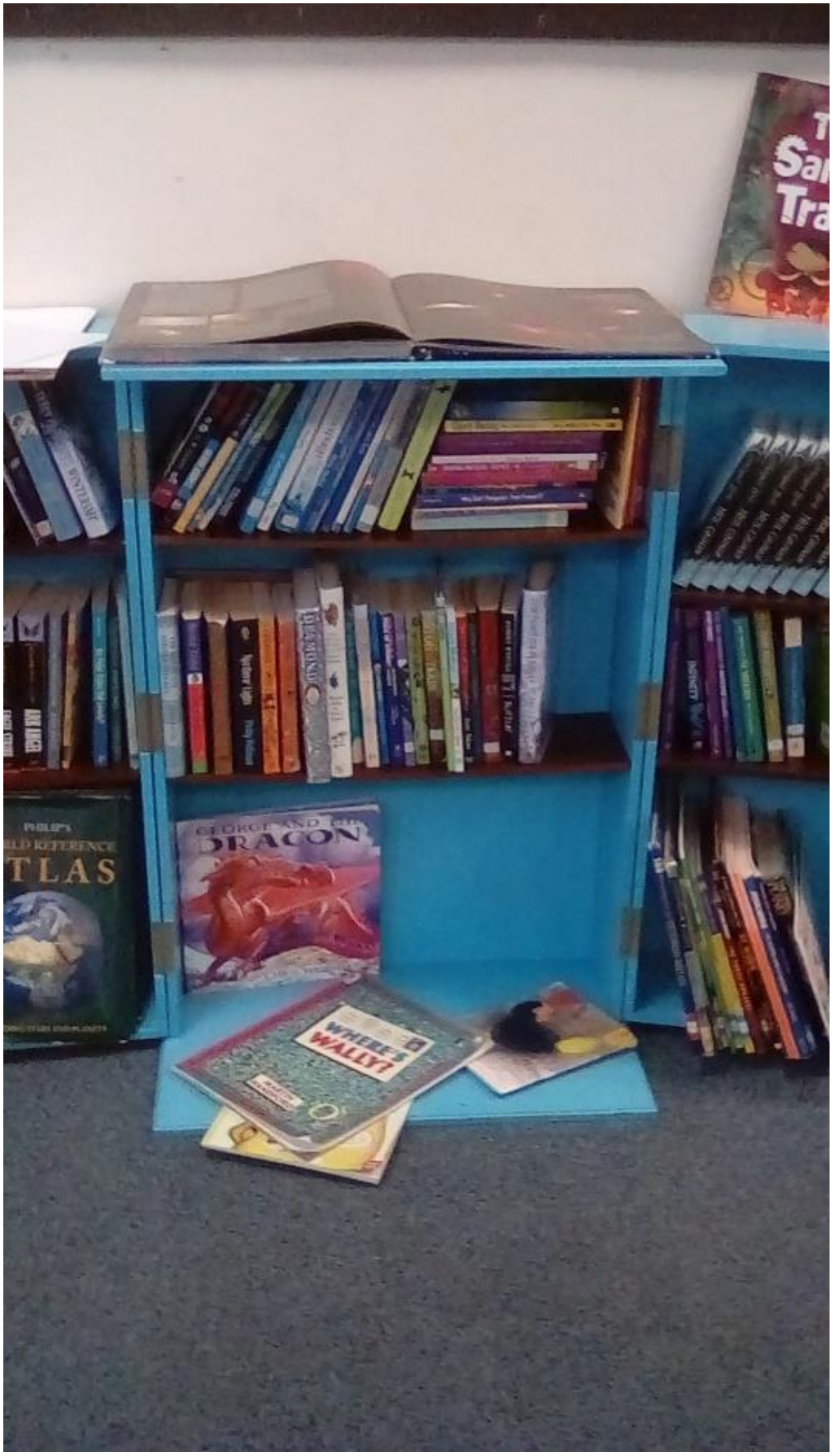


Figure 30 Amber class's library (Joe)

He explained that children were allowed to choose one book and that it was useful to have the books in the classroom as it made it easier to swap books and there was less likelihood of interrupting lessons in the library. Joe was clearly enthused by the option of swapping books and told me that he has swapped 15 books already; his favourite book was the atlas because he likes 'information'.

5.3.3 Teacher choices

The texts used in carousel guided reading and reading aloud were selected by the teacher and included the following novels during the first term:

Title	Author	Date published
Nina Bawden	Carrie's War	1973
Anne Fine	Bill's New Frock	1989
William Nicholson	Wind Singer	2000
Michael Morpurgo	Kensuke's Kingdom	1999
Cressida Cowell	How to Train Your Dragon	2003
Gillian Cross	Demon Headmaster	1982

Table 10 Current books for guided reading

The children expressed opinions about the various books in the first set of interviews. *How to Train Your Dragon* (Cowell, 2003), *Wind Singer* (Nicholson, 2013) and *Kensuke's Kingdom* (Morpurgo, 2003) were viewed positively and the children suggested that they were enjoying the texts. However, *Carrie's War* (Bawden, 1973) was described as 'complicated' (Charlotte), 'boring' (Flo) and 'hard' (Francis) with *Bill's New Frock* (Fine, 1993) also viewed as 'boring' (Debby). The children thought that it would be preferable to read books by David Walliams (Molly), Jacqueline Wilson (Francis) and J.K. Rowling (Charlotte). It is interesting to note that two of these authors were featured on the main display board in the library and are current, having published children's books within the previous year. By comparison, *Carrie's*

War was written in 1973 and *Bill's New Frock* in 1989. The age of *Demon Headmaster* was also highlighted in an observation of a carousel guided reading lesson with the supply teacher, Mrs Barker.

> Mrs Barker is discussing semolina. There is a conversation about this. Mrs Barker decides that this is an old-fashioned word and wonders if the book might have been written a long time ago. She checks. It was written in the 1980s – 37 years ago
>
> (20th November 2018 Field Notes).

It appeared that some of the older texts lacked relevance for the children in Amber class and were not books they would choose themselves. It has been noted that teachers often choose books based on their own preferences (Cremin, T. et al., 2014) assuming that children will enjoy them too or they select texts perceived as 'canonical' in terms of children's literature, for example, *Carrie's War*. Mr Dickens also selected most of the texts to read aloud in Amber class.

Reading aloud by the teacher occurred several times. It formed part of literacy lessons when Mr Dickens read examples of texts to support the children's writing or as a standalone session when reading aloud was the main purpose of the session. Mr Dickens was aware of my interest in reading aloud due to training I had delivered in a previous school; his inclusion of reading aloud for the purpose of pleasure may have been influenced by my presence. I will focus on these standalone sessions as these were discussed by the children in the interviews.

The children generally spoke positively about listening to a story and enjoyed Mr Dickens' storytelling technique:

> It's really nice because you can relax, and you don't have to do anything. You just need to listen to him read. And it's actually really nice because sometimes I don't really want to read. Sometimes I like people reading to me. (Ellen)

and,

> [w]henever it's got different characters and voices, he's very good at that. Because when we were reading a book about these Scottish elves, he did an amazing Scottish accent. It was really funny. (Janine)
>
> (20th April 20019 Field Notes)

However, their opinions of reading aloud and their responses during the sessions appeared to vary in relation to the chosen text. At the beginning of the year, when the class novel was *Wee Free Men* by Terry Pratchett (2003), Francis, an avid reader, experienced difficulty comprehending the text: 'I think I don't really get the book. It's a little bit hard and a little bit olden days' she explained. When I observed Mr Dickens reading *Wee Free Men* to the class, they did not appear engaged:

> He is reading Terry Pratchett. The children keep shuffling, swapping places. I think the story is too difficult for them to understand … There is a funny bit in the book – no one laughs. I don't think they are listening.
>
> (10th December 2018 Field Notes).

The story was chosen by Mr Dickens and he was a fan of Terry of Pratchett. When discussing books with the children, he explained that 'he has copies of Terry Pratchett's books with different covers – he has collected them all' (20th March 2019 Field Notes). Although Mr Dickens was reading from a text he was passionate about, the children did not appear to share his enthusiasm. During a discussion with Mr Dickens following the first set of interviews with the children, I outlined their preference for David Walliams. Mr Dickens reflected on the children's behaviour during story time and suggested that:

> the book he was reading aloud to the class might be considered a bit dull … He said he was going to read Walliams and see what happened (18th December 2018 Field Notes)

I was aware that Mr Dickens was not a fan of David Walliams' books and thought that his writing was poor. In my field notes, I observed that he 'doesn't like David Walliams. He doesn't think his writing is very good' (23rd November 2018 Field Notes).

When I observed Mr Dickens reading aloud from *Ratburger* (Walliams & Ross, 2012), the children appear to listen and engage with the story:

> Mr Dickens reads David Walliams' *Ratburger*. Children find comfy spots – lying on the floor on coats, bags, etc. Mr Dickens uses voices. Some of the children follow along using their own copy. Billy has his fingers in his mouth, like children do when they are very little. I notice that the children begin to snuggle into one another. I notice that a few children suck fingers and bite nails as they listen to the story. (8th March 2019 Field Notes)
>
> Joe is sat at Mr Dickens' feet. He doesn't move. He gazes at Mr Dickens. It is as though he is in a trance. (8th March 2019 Field Notes)
>
> It takes about five minutes for a calm to settle across the class. When he finishes, there is a collective 'no', followed by a 'Da…da…daaaaaa' indicating that something exciting is going to happen. (8th March 2019 Field Notes)
>
> I ask Tulip if she likes the story. She says yes. She says there was a really funny bit last time called 'sizzling bottoms'. I ask what happened. She can't remember but she liked it because it was funny. (8th March 2019 Field Notes)

Although the children were allowed to lie on coats and bags during story time with *Wee Free Men* (Pratchett, 2003), the lack of movement and collective response at the end of this session would appear to suggest that the children were more engaged during the session with *Ratburger* (Walliams & Ross, 2012). Their disappointment when Mr Dickens stopped reading perhaps indicates that not only were they listening to the story but that they were also invested in the outcome. It

would appear that when children are given a voice in reading materials and their preferences are respected, they engage positively with texts.

In the second set of interviews in June 2019, several of the children took photographs of the book, *Room 13* (Swindells, 2011); Mr Dickens was reading aloud from this book at the end of the day. This was a book I had given to Mr Dickens when I learned about the class trip to Whitby in Yorkshire; the story is set in Whitby Abbey (see figure 31).

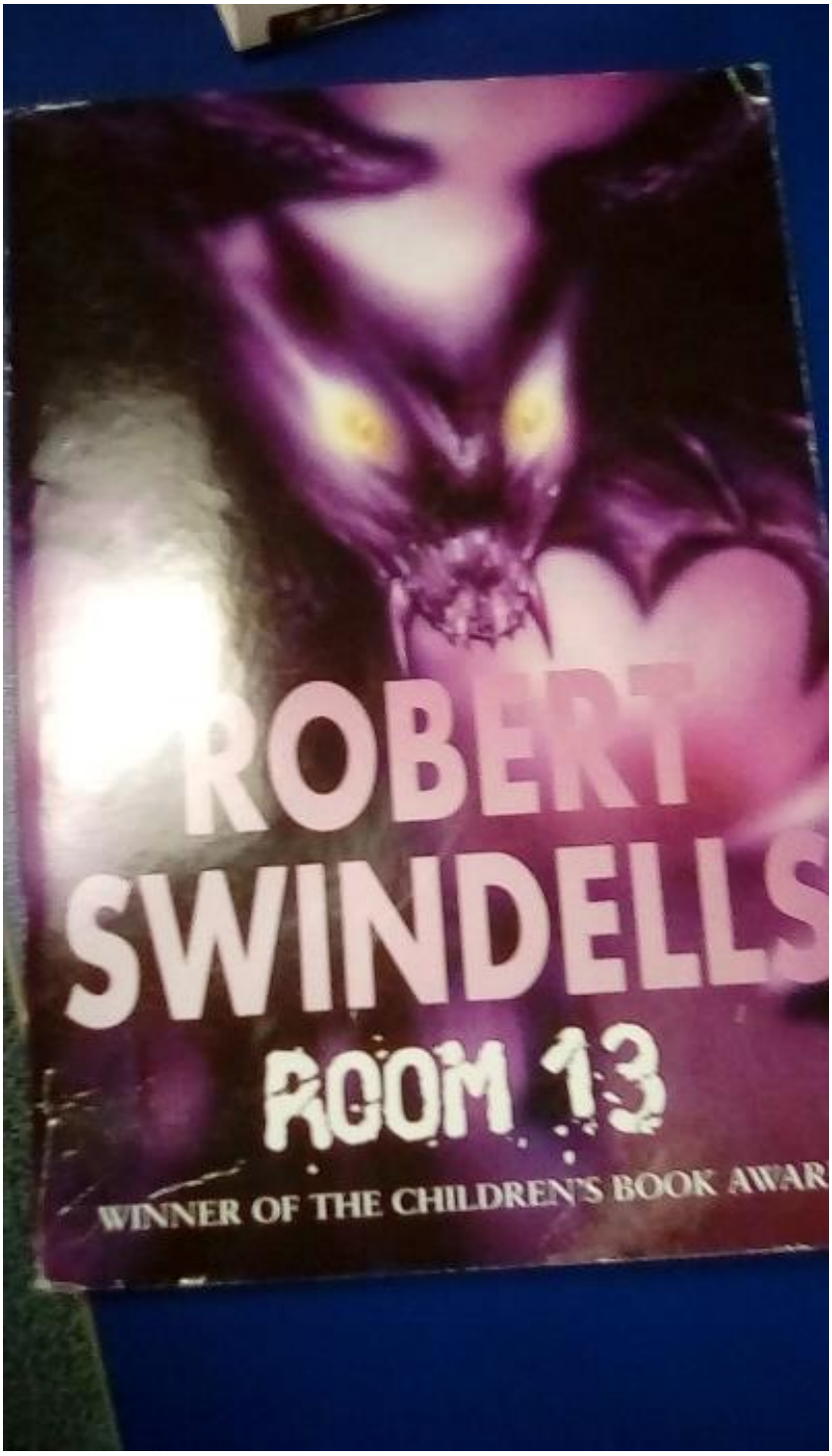


Figure 31 Class read aloud - Room 13 by Robert Swindells (Sarah and Tulip)

Janine explained that ‘it's a book that we're reading in class and it's a really good book’. Some of the children had purchased their own copies of *Room 13* so that they could follow the text when the teacher read aloud. ‘She's (Janine) got the same as school. So that's why she keeps it in the drawer … She follows along with him’

explained Sarah. My field notes confirmed that children had their own copies of the text: ‘Claire rolls onto her back and holds the book up in the air as she follows the text’ (2nd April 2019 Field Notes). Additionally, children also attempted to locate other books related to the text read aloud by Mr Dickens. ‘[S]ometimes when it's the end and it has ellipses, we try and find the next book to it,’ explained Ruby.

Janine described the plot of *Room 13*, relating it to a recent school trip.

> [It’s] about a girl who goes on a school residential to near where we went in Whitby. And she goes to a hotel in Whitby, and there's a room called room 13. But it's not actually a room. It's a storage cupboard place. But at midnight, it turns into room 13.

Similar to their response to *Ratburger* (Walliams & Ross, 2012), the children again expressed disappointment when Mr Dickens stopped reading:

> Mr Dickens says, ‘we’ll leave it there’. The children groan. Claire gives Mr Dickens a knowing look, as if to say she shares the knowledge of the book and recognises something bad is going to happen in the story (2nd April 2019 Field Notes).

The children appeared to enjoy listening to *Room 13* (Swindells, 2011). They seemed motivated to read (purchased personal copies of the text) and had a clear understanding of the story, demonstrating the ability to summarise the plot. This might be due to the relevance of the story, the suspenseful plot and the links with a recent experience in their lives.

It would appear that the choice of text for story time is important; when texts endorse children’s reading preferences or relate meaningfully to their lives, they seem enthusiastic and engaged and motivated to read. The teacher’s personal choice of reading material might not always reflect children’s interests or preferences. This is not to say that teachers should not introduce the children to new authors or titles, but

knowledge about the children as readers might be helpful. The children recognised this point.

Mr Dickens often shared his passion for reading and told the children about his favourite books and authors.

> 'Mr Dickens tells the children that he has copies of Terry Pratchett's books with different covers – he has collected them all. He tells them about the Harry Potter books and the covers of these. There is an adult version that is illustrated. The *Sitherine* cover was upside-down. Mr Dickens was in Waterstones at midnight for a new *Harry Potter* release. He shows covers of *Harry Potter* in different countries' (20th March 2019 Field Notes).

He also talked to the children about other books and authors such as Stephen King, Terry Pratchett, Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, extracts of which were used to support writing. However, although the children were aware of Mr Dickens' love of literature - 'he loves books. Because he's gotten a collection at his house' (Felicity) - they believed that he was not aware of their reading preferences. Debby pointed out that, '[w]e like to choose different books because teachers don't really know what we like and what we don't like'. Ruby and Ellen believed that it was important for Mr Dickens to have knowledge of them as readers. They suggested that a 'board with everybody's name on it' (Ruby) should be installed where children could add details about how they felt about reading (Ellen). Kerry and Daisy suggested a similar approach whereby the teacher would ask children's opinions about the books they were reading, such as, 'Are you enjoying your book? Have you read it and what do you think?' (Daisy).

5.3.4 Summary

The limited quantity and range of books in the staged boxes did not appear to match the children's interests and the children who read from the staged book boxes had

limited opportunities to exercise agency in their choice of text. Some children resisted their position as a staged reader by operating against the rules; this perhaps provided evidence of their frustration and anxiety relating to their position and their enthusiasm for reading, along with their determination to establish an identity as a successful reader. However, reading books matched to decoding ability was considered an important part of becoming a 'free' reader and this understanding was evident in the interviews.

Book choice also impacted opportunities for collaborative reading; children from Amber class appeared to struggle to engage with books they found uninteresting. They responded in a similar fashion when texts chosen by the teacher lacked relevance or personal appeal. When texts and activities had relevance and offered opportunities for children to adopt an active role in the process and exercise choice, children seemed to engage and enjoy reading. I will now consider the theme of time.

5.4 Time

5.4.1 Introduction

Time was a concern for both Mr Dickens and the children in Amber class. The amount of time allocated to activities varied; guided reading was allocated one hour daily on the timetable whereas activities such as reading aloud were more ad hoc. The children spoke about the lack of time for enjoying texts as an issue.

5.4.2 Independent reading and browsing

'Free' reading (or independent reading) was included as a timetabled session and occurred once a week as part of the carousel approach to guided reading. All children were allowed to choose any book from the library or shelves outside of the classroom, regardless of their allocated stage on the school reading scheme.

Other, non-timetabled opportunities for independent reading were available at the beginning of the day when the children arrived in class or when they had completed a particular task. For example, prior to the register being completed at the beginning of the afternoon session I noticed that 'Paul is reading Michael Morpurgo's *Kaspar'* (2010). This was a brief period of time as highlighted in my notes: '2 minutes and Mr Dickens asks the children to put their books away' (3rd December 2018 Field Notes). During non-timetabled independent reading, the children were limited to their stage book or a book from home. It could be argued that the time offered on these occasions was not enough for children to become immersed in their books. *Kaspar* is over 200 pages in length and 2 minutes does not provide much time for engagement beyond reacquainting themselves with the story.

As explained in section 3.3.4, Mr Dickens removed the 'free' reading session from the guided reading timetable and replaced it with a 'visual literacy' session halfway through the year. Following this change, the children's opportunities to read independently were limited to gaps before and after lessons. The interviews were conducted both before and after the removal of 'free' reading and provided a useful insight into the children's views of the activity and its subsequent removal. Mr Dickens also shared his view of 'free' reading and the reasons for the change in approach in an interview once the study had been completed.

The 'free' reading session was viewed very positively in the interviews with many children describing it as their favourite activity. Flo suggested that everyone 'celebrates whenever it's free reading' and Danny thought it was 'really fun'. The reasons provided by the children mainly centred around the opportunity to exercise choice. 'You can read anything' (Ben) and 'you get to go pick any book you [want] and just read with it' (Felicity). The option to be able to read from a book of personal

choice without the expectation to provide written answers was also appealing and the opportunity to visit the library seemed positive. '[I]f you're in free-read in guided reading, you can go to the library and pick the book,' explained Debby.

Some children believed that one session per week was not long enough and wished for more time. Jim took a photograph of the books available in the library (see figure 32) and explained the issue.

Figure 32 School library shelves (Jim)

> JIM: …you don't really get much time apart from in guided reading, so. I bet if we could just have a half an hour lesson so we can just read our books quietly for half an hour, then do a different lesson, that would be good.

The removal of 'free' read was, understandably, disappointing for those children who enjoyed the activity and it was raised as an issue in the second set of interviews. 'I don't like how he's took away free reading. You could read whichever book you

wanted,' explained Felicity. The subsequent lack of time for reading from self-selected books and the opportunity to exercise agency in choice (see section 5.3.2) were highlighted by Debby and Felicity. They also recognised that opportunities for independent reading were now limited to ad-hoc sessions before or after lessons:

> INTERVIEWER: Right. So when do you get to read books of your own choice?
>
> FELICITY: Never.
>
> DEBBY: Never really.
>
> FELICITY: Except for--
>
> DEBBY: Our reading book, when we get to read it, before other lessons.
>
> KERRY: Yeah. But if we finish it-- if he's told us to do a piece of writing in the book about it, we could. And then if we finished it, you could read your book.

The children also described the lack of time in the library as a problem. 'The library is massive' explained Daisy, '[i]t's like that big and it's got loads of books. We just don't have the time to look at all the books'. The children compared this unfavourably with their experiences in Year 4 when they were allowed to visit the library more regularly. '[I]n Year 4,' explained Tulip, 'every Friday we could go and pick a book from there, but we don't do it anymore'. The lack of time in the library and opportunities to change books perhaps led some children to read books that they did not enjoy or select books based on length rather than interest.

> TULIP: So then you have to ask the teacher if you can change it and he's like, "You only got that yesterday. You have to keep on reading that until you at least about halfway through it." So then, that's why I would sometimes choose smaller books because the really big books, I would only choose it if I'd check through the blurb like five times.

This view was supported by Debby who suggested that 'you should be able to read more often' and Francis, who believed that children should have 'more time to read'

as time for reading was limited to ‘playtimes in the morning and after dinner’. The lack of time devoted to independent reading and browsing appears common (Clark, C. & De Zoysa, 2011; Cremin, T. et al., 2014; Kucirkova & Cremin, T., 2018; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021).

Mr Dickens explained the reasons for the removal of ‘free’ reading in an interview in October 2019 – 4 months after the main research had finished. He said that the decision had been a collective one made with other schools and suggested that ‘[i]t's really about external pressures and the fact that we have to have these children ready for SATs’. To further justify his decision, he suggested that ‘free’ reading:

> wasn't free reading. It was sit and have a chat to the person sat to the side of you. It wasn't really reading. It was a time for them to have a little whisper and a gossip (interview with Mr Dickens, October 2019).

‘Free’ reading appeared to have been removed based on the assumption that, for it to be worthwhile, the children should read silently and/or individually. Although children may appreciate a quiet environment when reading independently (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004), opportunities for talk allow children to make connections with other texts and with their background knowledge (Hall, Katrina W. et al., 2014). Additionally, conversations initiated by children about texts can support reading for pleasure and develop communities of readers (Safford, 2014).

My field notes seemed to confirm that the children used ‘free’ reading as an opportunity to talk:

> I have a brief sweep of the classroom and, apart from the group with Mrs Barker, I can see two children who appear to be reading books. Some are completing tasks. Seven are using books as props:
>
> > Open in from of them as they gaze around the class

> Folded out but face down in front of them as if in a brief pause
>
> Open in their hands with a page waving as they talk to the person next to them
>
> Open, hand in book, head on other hand, talking to person opposite
>
> Open stood up at desk, talking to person opposite'
>
> (20th November 2018 Field Notes)

However, although the children did talk to their peers during 'free' reading, a closer examination of the data revealed that the content of their discussions appeared to the related to the texts that the children were reading. For example, Flo highlighted that, although she recognised that children talked during guided reading, discussions were based on the book and took the form of 'mini book review[s]'. Joe confirmed that the 'same thing' happened in his group. During a guided reading session that I observed, I noticed how children shared information about the books they were reading: 'Ellen has spotted that the contents page of *Kensuke's Kingdom* is also in Japanese on the opposite page. This information passes to another table'. (23rd November 2018 Field Notes). Also, in a whole-class guided reading session, I noted the children's references to the text as they spoke: 'Children are generally discussing the book, pointing to texts, flicking through pages' (4th February 2019 Field Notes).

The expectation of 'free' reading as a silent, independent activity reinforces the view of reading as an individual skill where children can practise decoding skills. However, the decision to remove it might overlook the benefits not only in relation to the time allocated for children to read from self-selected texts but also in terms of the opportunities (although perhaps unintended) that it provided for informal peer discussion. Time to discuss texts with peers gives children the chance to further develop their own ideas and opinions and supports the reading for pleasure agenda

(Cremin, T., Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2009). Additionally, talking about texts can help to develop the role of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978) as the children are also afforded the opportunity to engage with other readers, exploring and questioning their own understanding of a text in their co-construction of meaning (Maine, 2013) (for a more detailed discussion of Rosenblatt's theory, see section 2.1.1). The removal of 'free' reading also impacted opportunities for children to develop their browsing skills as time dedicated to 'free' reading incorporated time for children to change their books.

5.4.3 Reading aloud

Although the children often enjoyed listening to Mr Dickens read aloud (see section 5.3.3), it was not a timetabled activity and time allocated during the day appeared limited. On the occasions when I observed reading aloud, it occurred at the end of the day when Mr Dickens decided that there was enough time available. For example, at 3:15 pm I noted that '[i]t is tidy up time for 5 mins. Mr Dickens begins to read at 3:20 pm' (10th December 2018 Field Notes). The school day finished at 3:30 pm so story time lasted for approximately 10 minutes. On a different occasion, Mr Dickens explained to the children that if they 'tidy away he will read a story'. However, he 'couldn't find the book he wanted to read and the children need to get their coats and bags and line up to go home' (23rd November 2018 Field Notes). The lack of time was highlighted by the children in the interviews and they expressed a preference for longer story time sessions.

> SARAH: well, so when with Mr Dickens, "It's the end of the story," everybody goes, "Aw."
>
> INTERVIEWER: Why do they do that?
>
> TULIP: Because we want to listen to more.

The children also felt that a longer period of reading aloud would increase options for comfort when listening to a story.

> JANINE: I just kind of wish that maybe if we have some free time one day we can, like-- also we should probably put some more pillows on the carpet

and

> FLO: [i]n our old class, we used to have some pillows and blankets. And you used to be able to get them if you were really good.

The lack of time allocated to reading aloud seemed to impact the length of time needed to complete a novel. On April 2nd 2019 I observed Mr Dickens reading *Room 13* (Swindells, 2011) to the class. During my next visit on 3rd June, Joe informed me that Mr Dickens was still reading *Room 13* to the class, 9 weeks later. Allowing for holidays, this would indicate that Mr Dickens had been reading the same book for at least 6 weeks.

When I discussed reading aloud with Mr Dickens in the interview in October 2019, he highlighted the issue of story time being cancelled due to its positioning at the end of the school day: ‘I need to start wrapping up, I think, at 3 o'clock so we're tidy and we're ready’ he explained. He also told me that he would ideally incorporate story time into every school day but that this was difficult due to other pressures:

> My idea would be to get reading in at the end of every day, but it's trying to fit it in on the timetable when you've got all the pressure of getting the rest of the work done.
>
> (Interview, Mr Dickens October 2019)

The emphasis on ‘work’ was echoed in Ruby’s thoughts about listening to a story. She explained that ‘[w]hen we don't want to do work at the end of the day, we're tired and we just listen to the story. It's nice’. This would appear to suggest that story time

and ‘work’ were separate events in the classroom where ‘work’ was valued more highly. This would perhaps explain the lack of time allocated to reading aloud:

> So it's like on a Friday, now we've got science, which sort of takes all afternoon … It's the only time I can fit it in. We do topic on a Thursday where we mix up with the Year 5s and 6s, and they have to get the work done within that sort of afternoon slot, which they then need as much time as possible. Wednesday afternoon, I'm going to try and fit it in, definitely, on a Wednesday because we have maths at the end, but it's just trying to work around it. Tuesday afternoon I'm not in.
>
> (Mr Dickens Interview October 2019)

Although reading aloud for pleasure appeared to be an enjoyable and valued experience for both teacher and children, the time allocated to the practice was minimal. Sessions occurred on days when the teacher judged there was enough time available and other subjects seemed to take priority. The reason for this seemed to be that other areas of the curriculum were associated with ‘work’ whereas story time appeared to be associated with pleasure.

Reading aloud is supported by the NC with the requirement for children to listen to whole books (DfE, 2013). *The Reading Framework* also provides guidance for teachers in relation to ‘Storytimes’ and there is evidence that reading aloud supports the reading for pleasure pedagogy (Cremin, T. et al., 2014). It could be argued that, in terms of available reading identities, the message for the children was that reading activities associated with pleasure are perhaps less important than more formal written activities.

5.4.4 Summary

Time for reading in Amber class appeared to be allocated primarily to those activities with teacher-selected texts which provided some kind of written outcome. Four out of the five guided reading sessions required children to answer questions about a given

text with the remaining session providing time for reading the guided reading novel. Time for children to select, read or listen to texts seemed to be limited. In this classroom it appeared that the pressure the teacher experienced to deliver improved outcomes influenced the time they allocated to certain activities; in such a system, time for reading for pleasure appeared to be squeezed out.

5.5 Progress

5.5.1 Introduction

Progress in reading appeared to be linked to the ability to decode written texts fluently and answer questions about given texts. These are useful skills for SATs where children are required to read texts and answer questions within a given timeframe. Testing did appear to be high profile in Amber classroom and Mr Dickens made many references to SATs both in conversations with me and the children. For example, during a whole class guided reading lesson, he informed the children that it was important for them to make progress in reading in preparation for the SATs the following year. Most timetabled reading activities in Amber class required the children to produce written answers in response to questions about a text. The use of past papers and assessments in other areas of literacy, for example, grammar, along with the use of informal checks as part of the staged reading approach, helped to cement the view of literacy (and reading) as an individual skill that was quantifiable (Hall, Kathy, 2007).

I will discuss progress in relation to staged reading and comprehension considering how the approaches used in the classroom affected the children's perceptions and experiences of reading. I will also examine the teacher's expectations in relation to how children should engage with the reading activities he delivered.

5.5.2 Linear path

The staged reading approach at Rainside school seemed to be based on the premise that reading is an individual skill that can be improved through practice. Reading was presented as a linear path, reinforced through the hierarchical system with those who had successfully completed all the stages achieving ‘free’ reader status.

Progression through the reading stages was achieved through an assessment with Mr Dickens that involved a child reading aloud during a guided reading session.

> FRANCIS: You have to read to a teacher, and they have to say, "Well, I think you maybe need more practice," so they stay on the level, or "I think that's too easy for you. Move up a stage." And if you was on stage 9, you'd move to stage 10 on stage 11.

and,

> CHARLOTTE: he just checks their level and just sees if they need to move up or not, or if they can stay on that stage and keep working on it.

Ellen described the process as being able to ‘pass’ linking this achievement to improved confidence and use of expression.

> ELLEN: Once I read with Mr Dickens, he just said, "Oh, this is improving because if you like expressions-- because what makes you move is where you're really confident and your expressions and you've-- how do I say it? What's the word? Where you improve.

The judgment of children’s ability to read aloud and the reference to achieving a ‘pass’ seems to reinforce the conceptualisation of reading as primarily a measurable skill. The children accepted the process of assessment as part of their progress as a reader thereby normalising such procedures as part of everyday schooled reading.

The children viewed the approach as a useful method to help them monitor their progress in reading and improve their reading attainment.

> JANINE: Yeah, because if you don't move up stages, then you're not going to know that you're getting better. And you're just going to think that you're not doing very well in it. So if you move up stages, then you know that you're going to get better and better.

Although the staged approach was generally viewed by the children as a useful approach to teaching reading, there appeared to be a number of unintended consequences.

The children's perceptions of the process of progression in relation to staged reading explored notions of what it means to be a 'free' reader and it was interesting to discover how the children positioned themselves as part of this process. Billy believed that their allocated stage depended on 'how good you are' and Felicity supported this, explaining that 'the better at reading you are … the higher stage you go up'. Ellen described progress as finding the books 'easy' to read or that you had read all of the books in a stage. The association of reading stages with levels of intelligence was clear. Avid readers such as Francis pointed out that '[S]ome people can read better than others' and can read 'big books' whilst children who read from the staged boxes 'aren't as clever as others'. To make progress and become a 'free' reader the children believed that they needed to 'read more' (Joe). The focus on reading as an individual skill suggests that children accepted responsibility for their own reading progress – or lack thereof.

Understandably, the children who were reading from the staged boxes had a strong desire to reach 'stage 16-plus' (reading from certain shelves in the library) or 'free' reader (free choice from the library) and the process of progression affected their

perception of themselves as readers; the children's positioning in terms of an assigned stage and in comparison to others perhaps led to feelings of anxiety and frustration for those reading from the staged boxes.

The public nature of staged reading seemed to increase the pressure to achieve as the process was very visual; there were large green boxes in the corridor with stickers indicating the stage number and staged books were similarly labelled. Additionally, progression to the next stage was a shared event. For example, Charlotte explained that when a child moved to the next stage 'we celebrate … we give everybody a clap'. It was, therefore, public knowledge that children were staged readers.

Becoming a '16-plus' or 'free' reader and moving beyond the staged boxes links to what Glaser and Strauss (2011) describe as 'status passage'; a transition made by an individual which is recognised by others. Children who had yet to achieve the goal of being '16-plus' or 'free' reader attempted to preserve their self-esteem and developing identities as readers in a number of ways and this was clear in my discussion with Ruby and Janine.

When discussing the reading stages, Ruby explained that she was on '16…so I'm basically free read'. This appeared to indicate that she felt a need to justify her position as a staged 16 reader in terms of how close it was to being a 'free' reader. Ruby's anxiety regarding her position was highlighted again when she recalled the progress she had made in Key Stage 1. 'If you passed all of [the stages],' she explained, 'you can actually go straight on to [stage 8-15] even though you're Key Stage 1. I did that'. Ruby's current reading stage was clearly a concern for her and she used her past progress to justify her position as a good reader. She was clearly

frustrated that, although she had made accelerated progress in schooled reading in Key Stage 1, she had somehow not yet achieved the final goal of ‘free’ reader. Ruby resisted the label assigned to her and tried to distance herself from those who read staged books in an attempt to maintain her perception of herself as a successful reader.

Janine, defined as a stage 14 reader, also expressed concern regarding her status as a reader. After hearing that Ruby had progressed to Key Stage 2 books when she was in Key Stage 1, she compared herself unfavourably with her peer. She explained that she didn’t progress to Key Stage 2 books (when she was in Key Stage 1) and that she was ‘always rubbish at reading … [M]ost people feel like just because they're on a lower stage that they're worse’. When we explored this further, Janine began to unpick the process of progression and examine why her position might not be an accurate reflection of herself as a reader.

> JANINE: But because I was on a lower stage, I felt that when I was younger. But now I know some people that are on higher stages than me might be worse because they might have just got one book right, and then the teacher said, "Yeah you can move on to this stage." They don't know.

Janine resisted her position as a stage 14 reader by critiquing the system, highlighting that some children might make progress through the scheme based on a successful reading of ‘one book’. She furthered this point by suggesting that children should be made to read ‘lots of different books’ before they moved to the next stage.

Although Janine appeared to be negatively affected by the staged system and the comparisons with Ruby, she aligned herself with the process believing that it was an important aspect of learning to read: ‘if you don’t move up stages, then you’re not going to know that you’re getting better’. It would appear that Janine felt conflicted in

her understanding of the staged approach; she resisted the position assigned to her but also supported the notion that progression through the stages was important in terms of confirming her identity as a good reader.

The children's discussions suggested that the normalisation of reading as a linear path led to social embarrassment. Ruby and Janine had concerns about their positions as staged readers and the stigma attached to those who had not yet achieved 'free' reader status. They dealt with this embarrassment by developing narratives or 'clusters-of-stories' (Anzaldúa, 2012) to tell themselves in an attempt to preserve their status as successful readers. The 'clusters-of-stories' metaphor is used to describe the stories others tell about us or that we tell about ourselves as part of our identity construction. Janine and Ruby each developed a 'story' about their own personal journey: Ruby highlighted that her position as a reader was 'basically free-read' and justified her status as a good reader based on the accelerated progress she made in Key Stage 1 and Janine avoided the shame of being a staged reader through highlighting the limitations of the process of progression.

It would seem that Ruby and Janine experienced a level of anxiety and frustration related to the stage assigned to them by their teacher (Triplett, 2004) and in their comparisons with each other. The pressure to achieve and maintain an identity as a successful reader appears to have led these children to create these consoling narratives (Yardley, 2008) to protect themselves from the negative associations of reading from the staged boxes. The fact that the staged process was an official institutional system delivered by teachers and enacted by the children reinforces the importance of the assigned labels and the subsequent impact these can have on the children's developing identities as readers. As McCarthey and Moje (2002) suggest

‘identities are always situated in relationships, and … power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned on the basis of those identities’ (p.231). When reading is conceptualised as an individual skill with a linear path to success, this understanding may well affect not only the children’s identities as readers, but also their future reading identities as adults (Rosenblatt, 1978).

It would seem that when reading is presented as a linear path, children consider their reading identity in relation to their particular stage or level. Success in reading, and status as a ‘good’ reader, is framed as having good decoding skills and being able to read aloud fluently. As children managed their progress in relation to these goals, different text types were considered more or less worthwhile.

5.5.3 Text value

The children appeared to attach value to certain types of books in relation to making progress with some genres viewed as more valuable than others. As I explore in this section, their views were perhaps influenced by the location of texts, their use in the classroom and their perceived value in terms of supporting progress in the staged approach to reading.

As the children progressed through the reading stages, books generally appeared to include more text and fewer pictures. ‘Free’ readers were given access to the books in the library; these books were described as ‘harder’ (Felicity) and ‘longer’ (Francis) than the books in the staged boxes which included books with more or less text depending on the stage number. The staged boxes in Key Stage 1, as Janine pointed out, were ‘mostly full of just picture books’ whereas books with fewer pictures, more text and smaller font size were placed in areas accessible to more advanced readers.

The placement of picture books in lower staged boxes seemed to influence the value attached to such texts, leading to associations with younger children. As Francis suggested, picture books are suitable for ‘Key Stage 1’. The lack of picture books on the Year 5 and 6 bookshelves outside of the classroom was justified by Danny who explained ‘because we’re on a higher stage … we should be able to read more’. Not only did the children recognise picture books as unsuitable for better readers, they also believed that looking at pictures did not count as ‘reading’:

> INTERVIEWER: Are there any picture books in there? (stages 8-15)
>
> BILLY: What, like that you just look at pictures?
>
> INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
>
> BILLY: No.
>
> INTERVIEWER: No. Why not?
>
> BILLY: Because--
>
> DAVID: It's not reading.
>
> BILLY: [inaudible].
>
> INTERVIEWER: It's not reading?
>
> DAVID: No.
>
> INTERVIEWER: No.
>
> BILLY: It doesn't really help you. I mean, it might help you set the scene. But it doesn't improve your reading as much.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Doesn't improve your reading. So who would the picture books be for?
>
> BILLY: Year ones.
>
> DAVID: The younger children.

The children perceived picture books as lacking value in terms of improving word reading, developing imagination and improving writing skills.

> CHARLOTTE: I think that readings for learning new words that we've never learnt before to use them in our writing to improve our skills. And it's also to just use your imagination. So if it wasn't a picture book and there was just words you could use your imagination to picture that picture inside your head. And [inaudible] for your writing.

Although there was a general consensus that picture books did not appear to be useful in terms of making progress in reading and writing, some children explained that they enjoyed looking at pictures in the books that they read. Debby had taken a photograph of an illustration by Quentin Blake in Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (Blake, Q. & Dahl, 2017).

Figure 33 Page 42 from 'The Witches' (Debby)

> DEBBY: …there should be more pictures in books because there's not that many in books for older children. And I think pictures really tell you what the story's happening.

Ben also expressed a preference for illustrated books explaining that he ‘like[d] pictures’ and became ‘annoyed’ when books had ‘[a] full page, a full page, a full page, a full page [of words]’.

The desire to read books with pictures was possibly an area of tension for Debby and Ben. Although they expressed a desire to read illustrated texts, they were also aware that an identity as a good reader in school was associated with reading increasing amounts of text rather than pictures. This conflict was highlighted by Debby who explained that despite her enthusiasm for books that included pictures she acknowledged that there were ‘less and less’ pictures in books as the children got older and that picture books were suitable for ‘Key Stage one’ children. Ben also commented that although he enjoyed looking at pictures and the book he had selected had pictures in it, he swapped it for a different book. It could be that Ben recognised the lower status accorded to the book with pictures as when I asked him if he thought that picture books should be available on the Year 5 and 6 bookshelves, he said ‘no’.

Picture books are complex (Arizpe, 2003) where text and image can often be read independently or concurrently. Reading picture books supports skills of ‘slow looking’ (Tishman, 2018) where readers are encouraged to examine closely and look beyond first impression. Debby and Ben both appear to align themselves with the view that to maintain an identity as a successful reader, they should read books containing text rather than pictures. This appears to conflict with their desire to look at pictures and is possibly influential in terms of the books that they choose. Messages such as these can have significance for children’s identities as readers, perhaps encouraging them to value and read books that might be deemed socially and educationally acceptable but are ultimately not a reader’s preferred choice (Levy, 2009b).

Although picture books were viewed as unsuitable for competent readers, it was probable that the children were referring to fictional picture books, as non-fiction books – which often include pictures - were viewed as particularly important in relation to learning. When asked to comment about the type of reading valued in school, Francis believed that 'non-fiction, factual' books were most important 'because we need to learn' which is 'the point of coming to school'. The difference between fiction and non-fiction was also highlighted by David who explained that 'some of the books make you smarter, but some aren't educational. Some are made up'. It would seem that fiction books, although important in terms of developing the decoding skills needed to become a 'free' reader, were not valued highly in relation to learning more generally. This may also have been the case for other text types. For example, the only reference to digital texts in the interviews was in relation to writing. Ruby suggested that videos helped her to understand topics more clearly than reading a book and Ellen believed that videos were better in terms of providing ideas for her writing than written texts.

5.5.4 Comprehension

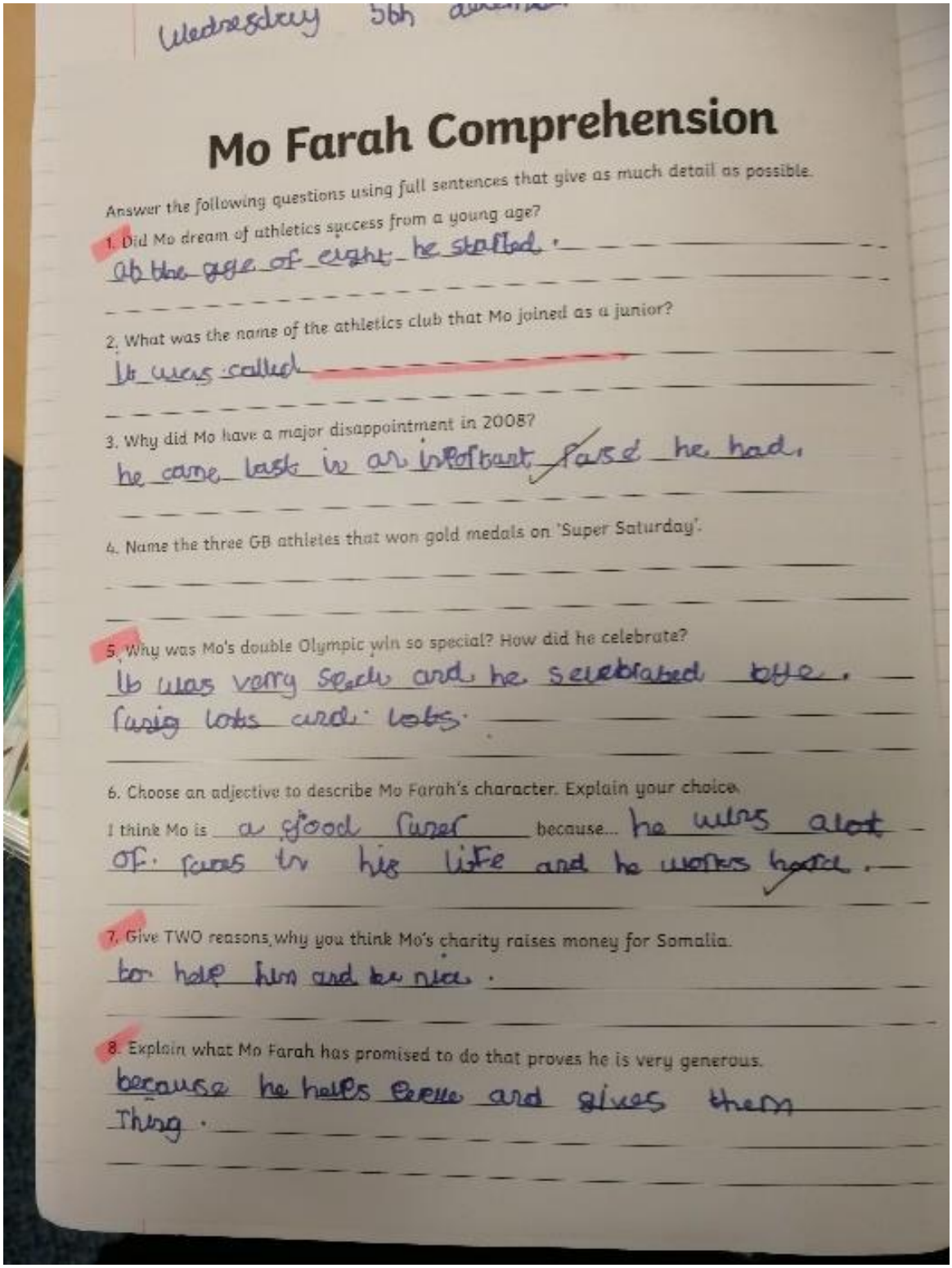
Three of the guided reading tasks involved providing answers (written and verbal) to questions about a text, which increased to four when 'free' reading was replaced with 'visual literacy'. Debby believed that the school's message regarding reading centred around the importance of being able to answer these questions.

> DEBBY: Probably to answer questions. So you know who the characters are. So if there's one that says, "How would you describe this character in words?" and you can put, "I would say this character is happy because he or she always is in a good mood," or whatever.

However, although there were several activities that required the children to provide answers to questions about a text, only one activity was actually labelled

‘comprehension’. This appears to reflect the idea that ‘comprehension’ is a distinct element of reading that can be delivered and assessed in isolation, detached from other reading activities.

The comprehension activity in Amber class was part of the carousel guided reading approach and involved the children reading a non-fiction text based on a particular person or theme, for example, Mo Farah, Usain Bolt and Roald Dahl (see figure 34).



Wednesday 5th

Mo Farah Comprehension

Answer the following questions using full sentences that give as much detail as possible.

1. Did Mo dream of athletics success from a young age?

At the age of eight he started.

2. What was the name of the athletics club that Mo joined as a junior?

It was called

3. Why did Mo have a major disappointment in 2008?

he came last in an important race he had.

4. Name the three GB athletes that won gold medals on 'Super Saturday'.

5. Why was Mo's double Olympic win so special? How did he celebrate?

It was very special and he celebrated by. running laps and laps.

6. Choose an adjective to describe Mo Farah's character. Explain your choice.

I think Mo is a good runer because... he wins alot of races in his life and he works hard.

7. Give TWO reasons why you think Mo's charity raises money for Somalia.

for help him and be nice.

8. Explain what Mo Farah has promised to do that proves he is very generous.

because he helps people and gives them Thing.

Figure 34 Guided reading - comprehension exercise

The text was provided on a worksheet that included a range of questions for children to complete. The children viewed the process as a type of 'test' (Ben) designed to monitor their engagement and support their reading skills.

FLO: [Comprehension] improve[s] our reading skills. For example, if we just read something and we didn't ask questions, then we'd not really get much from that reading. It'd just be staring at the words. Done with that. (see figure 35)

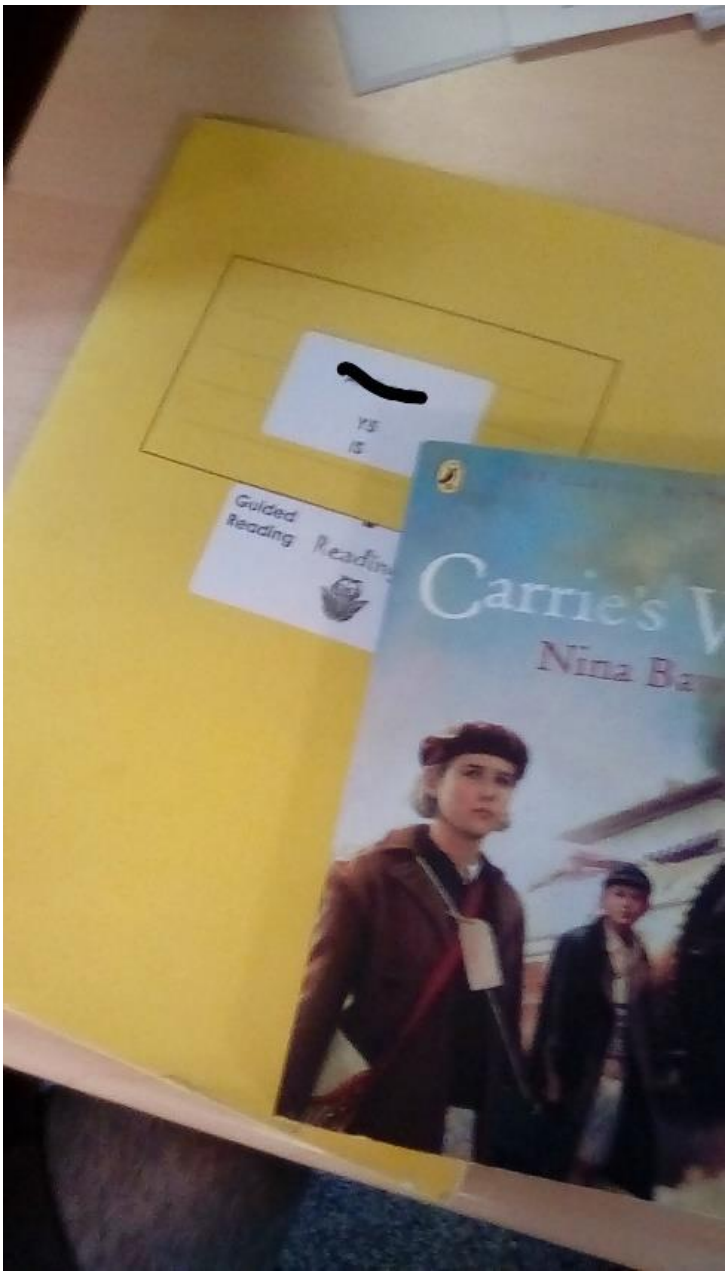


Figure 35 Guided reading text (Flo)

Flo's comments suggest that reading without answering questions lacks purpose.

Tulip believed that comprehension was rather like a problem-solving activity whereby children searched texts for 'correct' answers (Damico, Campano, & Harste, 2009).

TULIP: It's supposed to test your mind. It might be to challenge your brain a bit because you've got to search through the text

> and not make a mistake. Because if you make a mistake, you might say a word wrong, and then, if you put it down in the text because that's in the answer, and the answer, you might put it down and he might mark you wrong.

The importance of finding the correct answer was echoed by Charlotte who explained that ‘if you get anything wrong, it’s called think pink and the teacher underlines it in a pink highlighter’.

The view of reading comprehension as the ability to answer questions correctly reduces the role of the reader in the meaning-making process (Rosenblatt, 1978). The children were not encouraged to explore or share opinions and judgments about a text, rather they were expected to provide suitably formatted written answers which met with the teacher’s approval. As Francis suggested, ‘we just don't put down what we think. We put down what we find and exactly what it says in the text’.

The reduced role of the reader may have led to negative feelings about the activity as highlighted in some of the interviews. Comprehension was described as ‘boring’ (Jim and Flo), ‘hard’ (Ben) and ‘the thing that I don't really like about reading’ (Ruby). This is perhaps unsurprising as the texts appeared to be written for the sole purpose of supporting skills related to answering SAT-type questions and had little relevance to the children as readers. Charles explained that he did not enjoy comprehension activities as they were not ‘based on a book’.

The children experienced feelings of frustration as they searched for the answers during the comprehension activity. Ben, who struggled to find an answer to a question, admitted that he ‘just left it out’. The pressure to locate the information and provide correct responses was heightened as children who did not complete all of the questions would miss their ‘free’ reading session in order to complete the comprehension task (Janine).

The purpose of the comprehension activity was questioned by Ellen and Ruby who said that they did not know why they were asked to complete the questions and that the texts had little relevance to them as readers. Ruby explained that she had no knowledge of Mo Farah (the text being discussed was a biography of the Olympic runner) ‘and so we answer his questions, and we don't even know about him’. Although the activity appeared to lack relevance, the children believed it was important. As Janine stated, ‘this is proper work. It's not reading work. This is writing down work’. Francis, an avid reader, also viewed the comprehension exercise as important, suggesting that it was linked to future life chances:

> [s]o when … we have to do tests and exams and things like university-- in that university and things, we know how to do it right.

Reading comprehension is a complex process with the choice of text and the purpose for reading it both influential (Duke, Ward, & Pearson, 2021). The children’s understanding of what really matters in reading comprehension can be influenced by what is prioritised in the classroom. If the purpose of reading a text is to identify correct answers to questions related to teacher-selected texts, the message for children would appear to be that texts have definite meanings; this offers little opportunity for interpretation by the reader and the children’s voices were effectively silenced.

The children’s negative attitudes can be understood in relation to their reduced agency and the complexity of the task; the texts lacked relevance, had a narrow purpose and were teacher-selected – all important factors when considering reader motivation and engagement (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). As Hall, L, A., (2007) suggests, when there is little benefit for the reader and the task serves only to remind them of the skills they do not have, their desire to engage will diminish.

However, the prioritising of question-based comprehension exercises over other practices, for example, ‘free’ reading, appeared to reinforce the importance of such approaches in becoming a successful reader. Children seemed to align themselves with this view and were resigned to the understanding that providing correct answers to comprehension questions was essential to their progress as a reader and their journey to a better future. Comprehension activities altered with the introduction of whole class guided reading.

Whole class guided reading was introduced to the class in January 2019 using books selected by Mr Dickens such as Neil Gaiman’s *Graveyard* (2008). One whole-class guided reading session that I observed occurred in February and used the text, *Street Child* by Berlie Doherty (2009). The children were all given copies of the first paragraph on paper and the front cover was shared on the interactive whiteboard. At the beginning of the session, Mr Dickens discussed SATs with the children, explaining that the Year 6 children were getting worried about the tests. He suggested that, as they were in Year 5, they did not need to worry but they did need to make progress in reading in preparation for next year. The session, therefore, appeared to be framed as a lesson supporting progress toward standardised testing.

Mr Dickens began by discussing the front cover and the children shared ideas about what the book was about. He provided helpful background information relating to the industrial revolution. The children were given a thirty-second opportunity to talk with their partners about their thoughts. Joe and Billy were keen to share their ideas. They related the picture of the boy on the front cover to their previous topic which covered the Victorian period and the first world war.

After reading the text aloud as a class (children could either read aloud with Mr Dickens or just follow the text) Mr Dickens gave the children a sheet with questions related to the text titled, ‘Street Child Comprehension’. He instructed the children to work alone. He also explained that answers should be based on the text rather than their personal knowledge. Mr Dickens reinforced the importance of this point by sharing an example relating to a child who was an expert caver. He described how the boy had performed poorly in a SAT as he relied on his own knowledge rather than the text. This again reinforces the idea that reading comprehension is related solely to the text (efferent reading) rather than personal opinions and judgments (aesthetic reading) (Rosenblatt, 1986).

The text relayed the experiences of the street child, Jim, who shared a room with a man called Barney. He visited a local shop and used a coin to buy a pie. Billy and Joe appeared to ignore the direction to work alone and worked together. They approached the task by relating the events in the text to events and experiences in their own lives. Billy reflected on the boy sharing a room and explained to Joe that he was ‘better in [his] own room before [he] had to move in with [his] brother’. In relation to the food, they discussed where to buy fruit from and the fact that Billy only liked bananas. After reading about the pie, the boys discussed their favourite pies (Joe’s was raspberry) and what they would spend their money on:

> ‘They discuss cars, food, houses, camper van. One of them suggests that, if you had a car you could ‘buy pies, rush in van, chase me, shove it in your face, face paint, facely’. It sounds like he is playing with the words and associated meaning. Billy and Joe appear to have enjoyed this session’ (25th February 2019 Field Notes).

It might be argued that this unofficial, collaborative and interactional reading provides evidence to suggest that Billy and Joe lack enthusiasm and motivation in reading;

they appear to be off-task in relation to the teacher's expectations and engage collaboratively in the task against Mr Dicken's wishes. As Maybin suggests, examples such as these may seem to be "the very antithesis of school literacy, being spoken, fragmentary and fleeting rather than written, focused and sustained" (2013b, p.65). However, Billy and Joe clearly enjoyed reading and engaging with the text together and their role in the co-construction of meaning was important. The opportunity to engage in discussion at the beginning of the lesson, both with the teacher and then their partner, seemed to stimulate their interest in the text. This dialogue, along with their subsequent discussions, supports the idea that a text is open to interpretation and a range of responses possible (Maine, 2013) and that reading comprehension should be viewed as a process rather than a final goal (Duke et al., 2021). By using their background knowledge and personal experiences, Billy and Joe developed their understanding of the text and its relevance to them at that particular time (Rosenblatt, 1978) reinforcing the view of comprehension as "a dynamic and continuous process of thought" (Smith, V., 2010).

In relation to Mr Dickens' role, it is recognised that children's 'unforeseen meanings' (Dombey, 2010) provide a challenge for teachers who are perhaps pressured to achieve results in standardised tests, thereby valuing responses that are answerable to the text. The role of the reader is perhaps a point of tension.

5.5.5 Summary

Progress in reading in Amber class seemed to be viewed by the children as the ability to decode texts fluently and answer questions about texts provided by the teacher. The hierarchy created through levelling texts encouraged children to view reading as a linear path (Chall, 1983). Children who had achieved 'free' reader status were considered 'clever' and able to read the 'hard' books in the library;

children who read from the staged boxes experienced limited choice and compared themselves unfavourably with ‘free’ readers. The use of questions in many of the timetabled reading activities appeared to encourage the children to view texts as having identifiable meanings that were located within the text. Progress, therefore, was viewed in terms of their ability to detach from their own opinions and beliefs about a text and provide written answers that were viewed as ‘correct’.

As children attempted to make progress through the stages, they seemed to attach value to certain text types in terms of their relevance in the staged approach; staged books with text were viewed as valuable in supporting progress whereas picture books had little value and were deemed more suitable for younger children.

Chapter 6 Value and Position

6.1 Introduction

As I explored in Chapter 1, my starting point for this study was an interest in children who might be described as ‘reluctant’ or ‘struggling’ readers and in the potential of certain approaches, such as reading aloud, to motivate and inspire them to become engaged and enthusiastic readers. As the study progressed I became curious about the reasons why teachers labelled children as ‘reluctant’ or ‘struggling’. Research relating to literacy as a social practice broadened my understanding of what counts as reading and I began to recognise the value of a wider view of reading including reading images and digital texts. I also became aware that children who were described as ‘struggling’ or ‘reluctant’ readers in certain schooled activities might present as engaged and confident readers in others. Rather than looking for ways to motivate these children to read more in a traditional sense with a physical text, I was keen to consider their experiences of reading in school.

I initially hoped to learn about the children’s perceptions of reading in school; what practices they believed were valued (i.e. important – see section 3.3.6) by school and why (see section 1.4). While the children in Amber class valued reading for pleasure and opportunities to choose books they enjoyed, becoming a successful reader at school was primarily associated with fluency in decoding and the ability to answer questions about a text; engagement in discussion and breadth of reading did not seem to be valued. I came to realise that the children had absorbed the schooled values and revoiced them in the interviews. It would appear that against a backdrop of high-stakes testing, reading in Amber class became somewhat ‘test centric’ (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018) with more attention paid by both teachers and children to skill development. This awareness revealed an insight into the children’s reading

identities and how they positioned themselves and others through conversations and relationships (Frankel & Fields, 2019; Moje & Luke, 2009).

In section 2.2 I explored the research relating to identity development; I considered what identity is and how it is constructed. I outlined Moje and Luke's (2009) use of metaphors to explore identity; identity as difference, sense of self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative and position. Identity as 'self' or 'mind' recognises identity as goal-oriented with a focus on the development of the individual along a linear path whereas 'narrative' and 'position' allow for an understanding of identities as multiple and fluid, located in conversations and stories and produced in and through engagement in activities.

Using these understandings of identity/ies, I will argue that three possible reading identities were made available in Amber class: staged reader, accurate reader and pleasure reader. I suggest that the reading identities were made available through the use of certain activities and strategies used by the school and teacher along with the time allocated and use of particular resources. Although the identities discussed in this section could be considered 'available', they were not always taken up by the children and in some cases they were resisted. The identities considered are therefore *possibilities,* available to a particular child in a particular context at a particular time. While reading identities were not, therefore, inevitable, I do suggest that schooled activities, resources, wider policy and established school practices associated with them made some identities more likely than others.

In this chapter, I will consider the children's experiences, thoughts and feelings presented in Chapter 5 to answer questions 1 and 2:

1. What is valued about reading in school?

2. In what ways are children positioned in relation to schooled reading?

I will explore each question with reference to the four themes presented in the previous chapter: purpose, time, choice and progress and with reference to wider literature. I will discuss the areas of reading that were considered valuable (or important) by the school, teacher and children: staged reading, accurate reading and reading for pleasure. I will then explore how the children were positioned in relation to these approaches and consider the identities of staged reader, accurate reader and pleasure reader. I begin with staged reading/staged reader.

6.2 Staged reading

As discussed in section 5.5.2, the children in Amber class valued the staged approach to reading and understood progress in reading as hierarchical and associated with intelligence and progress. The information about each child's reading stage was public and despite the teacher's attempt to mask the use of ability as the basis for grouping children together for guided reading by using names associated with space, the children seemed to be aware that the groups were based on their reading stage (see section 3.3.4). The goal of 'free' reader provided a recognisable endpoint on the reading journey and was considered motivational.

To make progress, the children identified the skill of being able to decode aloud as significant as this enabled them to achieve a 'pass' when tested by the teacher (see section 5.5.2). Using language associated with assessments, the children seemed to understand reading as a measurable skill. Additionally, the focus on decoding appeared to diminish the value of other forms of reading; pictures were considered unimportant and there was no mention of wider views of reading such as digital texts (see section 5.5.3). The provision of levelled texts in numbered boxes reinforced the

notion that reading was hierarchical and dependent on decoding skills. This approach served to limit the reading experiences of the children, particularly those who read from the staged boxes.

Staged reading aimed to provide books that were matched to a child's decoding ability and the children believed that it was important to read books at the correct level; library books were considered too difficult for staged readers (see section 5.3.2). Matching texts to children's decoding ability may seem sensible based on the assumption that it supports progress and helps children to gain confidence as their skill level increases (Clay, 1991). However, the use of levelled texts can lead to children reading books that are of little interest to them (Abodeeb-Gentile & Zawilinski, 2013) and this appeared to be the case with children describing the staged books as offering little in terms of enjoyment (see section 5.3.2). This is a concern highlighted by Dzaldov and Peterson (2005) who suggest that levelled schemes can lead to students with "diverse interests, unique experiences and background knowledge" all choosing independent reading materials "from a bin marked 'Level G'" (p. 222). Additionally, scheme books can also be limited in terms of "vocabulary, lexical density and syntactic complexity" (Luke, Carrington, & Kapitzke, 2013, p.414) thereby restricting children's exposure to more complex language and grammatical structures.

The emphasis on decoding in Key Stage 2 served to build on earlier reading experiences. As part of their schooling, the children in Amber class would have completed the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1. The continued focus on being able to decode fluently throughout their school life perhaps reinforced their understanding of reading as an isolated skill to be developed (Carter, 2020). Where approaches to reading are valued at policy level and by schools and teachers,

children understandably recognise their value in terms of what counts as reading (Heap, 1991). This view of reading would appear to be narrow, reinforcing the understanding that it is a measurable skill to be tested and measured.

6.2.1 Staged reader

The public nature of the staged reading strategy led to children recognising their position within the class (see section 5.5.2). Progress was the responsibility of the individual and was demonstrated as the children moved through predetermined levels until they achieved success in the form of becoming a 'free' reader. As explored in section 5.5.2, although some children critiqued the approach, they ultimately accepted their allocated label as an accurate reflection of their reading ability and themselves as readers.

The ordering of individuals in a hierarchy reflects the current agenda in education with free market thinking through the use of measurement, evaluation and comparison (Leys, 2003). The identification of a 'stage' as a representation of a child's reading ability is indicative of the neoliberal requirement relating to measurements and performativity; to be accountable, children must first be represented with a numerical value. Reducing children to "rankable data points" (Sonu, Gorlewski, & Vallee, 2016, p.4; Sonu & Benson, 2016) provides the necessary numerical values to allow for governance through market forces and the continued influence of the neoliberal approach to education in England over the last 30 years has led to such practices being considered neutral and normal (Keddie, 2016). Such positionings can be problematic.

Research suggests that a child's awareness of their position within a reading hierarchy can influence how they perceive themselves as learners (Roberts-Holmes

& Kitto, 2019) and is an important factor in becoming a successful reader (Abodeeb-Gentile & Zawilinski, 2013). Positions within the hierarchy are relative; for children to be considered successful, others must be positioned as failures. This was evident when Janine compared herself negatively with Ruby and considered herself to be 'always rubbish' (see section 5.5.2). As Slater and Seawright (2018) suggest, neoliberal schooling involves measurements that require subjects to be "fundamentally pitted against each other" (p.375). The association of reading stages with intelligence was also influential in terms of how the children perceived themselves and others.

As discussed in section 5.5.2, 'free' readers were considered to be better and more intelligent than staged readers. The language used to describe individuals and the language individuals used to describe themselves is relevant in relation to their reading identities (Janks, 2010). Reading can be considered a "highly emotional realm" (Scherer, 2016, p.405) and labels can "confirm and amplify" an individual's attributes and become self-justifying (Atkinson, 2017, p.89). For children who were considered 'free' readers, words such as 'clever', 'better' and 'confident' might be welcomed. However, for those reading from the staged boxes, the understanding that they were 'less' able than other members of the class might prove upsetting with 'staged' reader becoming a position to be avoided (see section 5.5.2).

Children who are considered 'low' ability may also experience low self-esteem and experiencing feelings of isolation (Archer et al., 2018; Campbell, 2015; McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020; Taylor, Tereshchenko, & Francis, 2019); levels of engagement in reading may also be affected (Glasswell & Ford, 2011) with reduced motivation and competence in a range of tasks (Caldwell & Leslie, 2003). This appeared to be the case for Joe who read from the staged boxes (see section 5.5.2). In accordance with

neoliberal principles, he accepted individual responsibility for making progress believing that he needed to increase the amount he read in order to become a ‘free’ reader (see section 5.3.2). Nonetheless, in lessons that presented an opportunity to read a text and practise his decoding skills, he did not engage (see section 5.4.2), hindering his prospects of achieving his goal. The book choices available to him may also have been a factor.

As discussed in section 5.5.2, improvements in decoding ability led to the ultimate endpoint of ‘free’ reader and greater access to texts. However, the progress of children who read from the staged boxes was probably restricted by the limited selection of texts available and they faced the prospect of becoming ‘stuck’ (see section 5.3.2). This approach does appear somewhat counterintuitive; although staged texts might provide a shortcut to such selections, if these selections do not match the children’s interests or preferences they may be less inclined to read, thereby limiting their exposure to the complexities within written texts and reducing their capacity to improve their decoding skills. As Lupton and Hemple-Jorganson (2012) suggest, children who are not yet fluent readers have less autonomy and their choices are limited (Schraw, Flowerday, & Reisetter, 1998).

It also appeared that the implication for these readers was that it was unimportant for them to develop genre and author preferences until they had successfully mastered decoding; being an agentic reader with a range of options was the privilege of the ‘free’ reader rather than a right for everyone. Cremin, T. and Simpson suggest that children who are considered to be of ‘low’ ability can be caught in a “hermetically sealed cycle of disadvantage” (2022, p.264) and this did appear to be a possibility for the staged readers in this study. However, although the allocation of stages appeared to be normalised in Amber class, such strategies have been queried.

Street (2011) suggests that the validity of judgements made about individuals in relation to their 'lack of literacy' is questionable. He explained that such judgements are made by those who have the power to "define what counts as literacy" and that inequality is "imposed" on individuals when they "internalise" these "outside views of literacy" (p.581). Defining children through the use of numerical values serves to "flatten their complexities" (Kromidas, 2022, p.495) by focusing on a narrow range of individual skills rather than appreciating their more convivial and communicative engagements with reading. Labels such as 'stage' and 'level' appear to offer an easy option in terms of identifying children's reading ability (McCarthey & Moje, 2002) however, they do not perhaps reflect the full range of children's reading abilities and are based on a limited view of reading. Children who struggle to decode fluently may demonstrate positive attitudes and motivation in other reading activities which might go unnoticed. For example, Joe and Billy's discussion in guided reading (see section 5.5.4) might be considered a thoughtful and collaborative engagement with a text rather than being viewed as 'off-task' and against the teacher's wishes. There may also be consequences for those who might be considered as 'high' ability. Children who are judged successful in relation to reading proficiency may develop a false sense of their abilities; being a 'good' reader in this context might not always be an indicator of a positive reading identity more generally (Caldwell & Leslie, 2003).

The hierarchical approach to reading at Rainside school reflects a view of identity as something that might develop in stages (Erikson, 1968). The linear path of staged reading supports the view of 'identity as self' where identity is presented as goal-oriented and also links to the view of identity as mind or consciousness where identity develops along a linear path (Moje & Luke, 2009). However, when identities are recognised as social constructions, fluid and changeable depending on the

context, it may be possible to reconsider the use of such an approach. We can acknowledge and value children's *many* reading identities rather than privileging those based on a narrow conceptualisation of reading based on skill development.

The role of policy is also a consideration and is, as Scherer (2016) suggests, perhaps the 'silent actor'. In line with neoliberal principles, the aim of government is to ensure individuals' "innate right to succeed" and provide access to the skills needed to flourish in society in an efficient manner (Lambirth, 2011, p.98). Schools must subscribe to government directives and Ball highlights that policies that focus on "target setting, accountability and comparison" (2010, p.123) directly influence a teacher's practice and, consequently, how children experience reading in school. As neoliberal subjects, the children in Amber class learned to privilege the aspects of learning that were measured and viewed themselves to be testable subjects. The fear of being left behind or considered unintelligent led the children to *desire* the status of 'free' reader; books in the library were coveted and individual responsibility was accepted for achieving the end goal. They understood and accepted academic progress in childhood as linear, measurable and evenly paced (Falchi & Friedman, 2015).

In an environment such as this, children are 'commodified' in relation to their reading stage, their potential to improve the school's ranking and their future contributions to the employment market. They are encouraged to believe that, through hard work and endeavour, they can be successful. However, although the neoliberal discourse implies that success can be realised through individual effort, this is not always the case (Nairn & Higgins, 2007). Finding answers to questions about a text was also considered important.

6.3 Accurate reading

As highlighted in section 1.3, a focus on high-stakes tests can lead to curriculum narrowing with a concentration on assessed subjects (Boyle & Bragg, 2006; Hall, Kathy, Collins, Benjamin, Nind, & Sheehy, 2004) and an increased emphasis on memorisation and utilisation of practice questions or prior exam papers (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002; Reay & Wiliam, 1999). SATs in reading are influential in terms of narrowing the curriculum and reinforcing the view of reading as a measurable skill (Moss, 2017). This appeared to be the case in Amber class.

Many of the reading activities required the children to provide written answers to questions about texts that could be marked as correct or incorrect (see section 5.5.4). The children recognised the importance of locating a preordained answer rather than using their own background knowledge to offer opinions and interpretations and considered words to have 'fixed' meanings (see section 5.5.4). This supports findings from wider research. As highlighted in section 2.4.1.2, studies exploring guided reading found that approaches used by teachers supported children in finding predetermined answers based on evidence from a text whilst also being encouraged to limit their own ideas (Fisher, 2008; Phillips, 2013; Skidmore, Perez-Parent, & Arnfield, 2003).

The *National Curriculum* also supports the view of reading as having 'fixed' meanings and outlines the importance of knowing the meaning of words before attempting to read a text:

> The meaning of some new words should be introduced to pupils before they start to read on their own, so that these unknown words do not hold up their comprehension. (DfE, 2013)

This understanding of reading can be considered autonomous (Street, 1984) where text and words are considered to be neutral and meaning is non-negotiable.

The types of texts used to support the development of this skill would also appear significant. The use of commercially produced materials such as past SAT papers and worksheets seemed to reinforce the assumption that texts are provided by authority. Their purpose is for instruction; they are not connected to other areas of interest and are intended to be completed during one sitting (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018). The use of such texts perhaps led the children to recognise non-fiction texts as educational and more important than fictional texts as they had the capacity to improve intelligence (see section 5.5.2). This is potentially limiting in terms of the decisions children made about their own reading preferences. Where fiction is positioned as worth 'less', the desire to engage in reading practices with fiction books of their own choosing may also seem unimportant. As Simpson and Cremin, T. (2022) suggest, the use of texts as "tools for literacy instruction" can lead to children "reading for the system, rather than reading for themselves" (p.10), interpreting reading as an opportunity to analyse and agree with a particular interpretation rather than developing their own opinions.

6.3.1 Accurate reader

An approach that focuses on answering questions correctly about a text and recognises meanings as fixed could be considered 'test-centric' (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018) (see section 6.1) and this emphasis on accountability in Amber class served to position the children (and teacher) in certain ways. Accountability is central to the neoliberal agenda (Jaeger, 2017). Children and teachers are held to account through assessments against standardised measurements such as SATs; those involved – schools, teachers and pupils – are reduced to 'auditable commodities' (Ball, 2003) or

a “statistic”, made to “jump through hoops for the benefit of others” (Hutchings, 2015, p.1). As discussed in section 5.5.4, the children in Amber class were held accountable through the use of comprehension exercises that required correct answers to questions about a text, similar to those used in SATs. As such, their own role in the reading process was not valued; to be considered a ‘successful’ reader was based on their ability to limit their personal interpretations and contributions. Those who found this difficult or considered texts to be open to interpretation would have their work marked as incorrect or would be considered deviant.

In this environment, the children were encouraged to be passive, benign consumers (de Rijke, 2021) with little opportunity for interpretation and engagement with the text. They were required to “suspend their interpretative authority” (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018, p.584) and accept a reduced role in the comprehension process. It was assumed that texts had one, true meaning and the role of the reader was diminished. The power was with the text rather than the reader which has been described by Rosenblatt (1978; 1986) as ‘efferent’ reading. A passive role that leads to improved outcomes is an important aspect of the neoliberal agenda.

Keddie (2016) argues that children in today’s schools have become ‘children of the market’ where the context of neoliberal imperatives impacts their developing identities. A child’s value lies in their ability to contribute to the school’s performance through achieving positive outcomes in measures of attainment such as SATs. Progress, in this context, enables them to add positively to society through improved employment prospects (Keddie, 2016). Such an approach minimises children’s agency but may also lead to a limited understanding of comprehension.

A narrow focus designed to improve test outcomes does not necessarily lead to improvements in underlying levels of understanding and skill (Hutchings, 2015) nor does it guarantee a child's future success upon leaving school (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996). SATs assess only a limited range of skills. Tennent (2020; 2014) argues that reading comprehension is 'componential' in that it involves a range of factors and processes working interactively including linguistic processes, cognitive processes, metacognitive processes and background knowledge. He suggests that SATs are unable to account for this range of complex processes and Kintsch and Kintsch (2005) believe that it is impossible to measure comprehension as a uniform construct. Maybin (2013) highlights that approaches such as these give messages that reading comprehension is an end in itself which offers "reductive and impoverished" (p.66) forms of reading.

When children operate in different ways from those intended by the teacher and arrive at answers different from the ones imagined, it might be useful to consider their responses as reflective of their cognitive and linguistic engagement with a text and acknowledge that, as part of the comprehension process, readers are active; reading is an ongoing process, open to interpretation and involving imagination, emotion and fun (Maybin, 2013). Kucer (2015) supports this view suggesting that where text-based meanings can serve to limit readers and position them passively, a broader interpretation of comprehension incorporates the reader's ability to go beyond the information in the text, making text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections. In this way, teachers and children may be able to move beyond an understanding of texts that can be judged as right or wrong, and teachers can develop a deeper understanding of children's different interpretations of texts. Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that such engagements are pleasurable and represent

‘aesthetic’ reading where the role of the reader is central when making meaning with texts. Readers enter into a transaction involving both the reader’s background experience and the experience provided by the author in the text.

However, an approach to reading that offers opportunities for children to be agentic readers may not be appealing in a ‘test-centric’ classroom as meanings constructed by readers when reading texts are not always restricted to the information provided by the text (Kucer, 2015). Children’s opinions and interpretations are not easily tested as part of the current accountability system operating in schools (Maybin, 2013) and where reading approaches aim to teach skills in isolation, options to explore alternative ideas and opinions will be discouraged as they might “disturb the learning process” (Moss, 2021, p.47). As Willis and Harris (2000) suggest, a standardised curriculum offers the illusion of a neutral and value-free education system that is equal for all.

Nonetheless, the use of tests that rely specifically on text-based, correct-answer formats privileges certain learners (Willis & Harris, 2000). As Heath (1983) suggests, children made good progress when their home literacy was closely matched to the ‘autonomous’ model of literacy (Street, 2005) delivered in schools. Heath also highlighted that when children’s literacy practices did not match those in school, they were not valued, whereas when teachers adapted the curriculum to build on and value their informal literacy practices, children who had been viewed as ‘lacking’ in literacy skills, also made progress.

If these are the approaches used by the teacher who is an avid reader, it is worrying. For children to develop a range of reading identities, they will need to experience a wider range of activities that value their differing responses to, and interpretations of,

a variety of texts. Perhaps the only advantage of a ‘test-centric’ classroom is that children have an awareness of what is expected in assessments and they feel prepared. This would appear a very small offering.

Although reading in Amber class appeared to focus primarily on proficiency, the children and teacher did value opportunities to read for pleasure and recognised the value of having time to read with self-selected texts.

6.4 Reading for pleasure

Reading for pleasure within and outside school was considered valuable by the children with references to independent reading, book choices and listening to the teacher read aloud (see sections 5.4.2, 5.3.2 and 5.4.3). However, time and resources served to constrain the children’s opportunities in this area.

As discussed in section 5.4.2, ‘free’ readers had full access to the library and ‘staged’ readers had access during the weekly ‘free’ reading session. Having agency and choice are recognised as important in terms of supporting reading for pleasure (Kucirkova & Cremin, T., 2018; Lockwood, 2008) (see section 2.1.4) and reading from self-selected texts is a key element of becoming a reader (Cremin, T., Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2014), supporting the National Curriculum’s statutory requirement of developing pleasure in reading (DfE, 2013). However, for children to develop as readers, it is perhaps more complex than simply providing access to materials.

As outlined in section 5.4.2, the library appeared difficult to navigate and the children compared the limited time allocated to browsing unfavourably with their experiences the previous year. This led to children choosing books of little interest with some children bringing books from home instead (see section 5.3.2). Recognising that it is

important for children to be able to exercise the *right* to choose, having the *capacity* to make good choices is also important. Simply providing children with a range of books is not sufficient in supporting them to become readers; 'more' choice does not necessarily equate to 'good' choices and children who might be thought of as 'poor readers' may simply be 'poor choosers' (Mackey, M., 2022). Ross (2000) suggests that the process of selecting texts is complex. She reported relevant factors such as a reader's mood and preferences, considerations of book length and also how readers are alerted to books that may interest them. She suggested that books might be judged according to the reader's familiarity with the written conventions and cognitive and emotional commitment required. For children to develop as readers, it is important that they are given time to develop these skills; time to consider factors such as author, plot, character and genre (Bang-Jensen, 2010). Selecting texts is a skill to be learned (Mackey, A., Fell, de Jesus, Hall, & Ku, 2022) and can be a very personal process; it can depend on a reader's mood where a judgement is made about the relationship between what a text can offer and what a reader's needs are at that particular moment (Ross, 2000).

The provision of 'limited' texts in the library session seemed to support the children in making suitable choices; children were given time to browse a selection of texts, discuss options with peers and swap books where necessary (see section 5.4.2). It was interesting that staged readers, such as Joe, engaged fully with the activity demonstrating enthusiasm and enjoyment. The introduction of a class library into the classroom also appeared to be a positive step, providing access to a restricted number of books with opportunities to swap texts regularly (see section 5.3.2). Bang-Jensen (2010) advocates for approaches such as these and points to the potential benefits of providing children with curated lists. She suggests that such an approach

supports a move away from levelled texts which she recognises as reductionist in terms of both the text and the reader. She believes that by using lists of recommended titles, children can focus on aspects of choice such as author, genre, characters and plot, becoming aware of their own preferences and moving away from the identity allocated to them based solely on their 'level'. Bang-Jensen also found that children began to view themselves as readers of 'mystery' or 'history' genres and enjoyed discussing the allocated books and providing recommendations for others. However, although the library session and the provision of a class library appeared positive in terms of supporting the children's browsing and selecting skills, the library session was a one-off event and without time to read independently, a class library would appear somewhat redundant. Another option to support children in making suitable text selections related to the teacher and their guidance is considered influential.

As highlighted in section 2.1.4, teachers have a role to play in promoting reading for pleasure through guidance on texts and knowing about the children in their class as readers (Cremin, T., Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2009). However, although the teacher in this study was an avid reader himself (see section 3.3.1), the information he shared with the children did not appear to support their development as readers; he rarely mentioned children's fiction and authors unless it was with reference to a text used in guided reading or as a stimulus in writing. This was in stark contrast to his extensive knowledge of adult fiction which he regularly referenced in literacy lessons (see section 5.3.3).

The focus on adult fiction could appear dismissive of the children's views and opinions relating to the literature and authors that they enjoyed and might give children the message that adult fiction has more value than popular fiction written for

young people. This appears to suggest a hierarchy of reading whereby children's fiction is viewed merely as a vehicle on the journey to adult fiction rather than worthy of consideration in its own right. This is an issue recognised more widely.

The reduced role of children's fiction compared to adult fiction has been highlighted by children's authors such as Frank Cottrell-Boyce. Speaking on the Today Programme on BBC Radio 4 (Hussain & Webb, 2022), he pointed to the limited discussions and reviews of children's literature in local and mass media along with minimal shelf space in popular outlets such as supermarkets. In addition to this lack of coverage and promotion, prizes for children's fiction have also been reduced: the Guardian newspaper have dropped their award for children's fiction and the Carnegie award is now for young adult fiction rather than children's fiction.

An activity that *did* involve the teacher sharing children's texts was reading aloud. Reading aloud was highlighted as an enjoyable activity by the children. They valued listening to the teacher use a range of voices as he read a story and particularly appreciated hearing stories that matched their interests (see section 5.3.3). As Barton (1986) suggests, reading aloud is similar to storytelling and the teacher's performance appeared to draw the children together in a community event (Chambers, 1993). However, the initial choice (made by the teacher) of *Wee Free Men* (Pratchett, 2003) was based on the teacher's preference and did not engage the children (see section 5.3.3). This would appear to concur with research suggesting that teachers rely on their favourite texts from their own childhood (Cremin, T. & Durning, 2020) and that to be able to make choices that are relevant for the children in the class, teachers should have a wide knowledge of suitable texts (Cremin, T., Bearne, Mottram, & Goodwin, 2008; Cremin, T. et al., 2014). Additionally, if the curriculum is to value children's interests, it may be useful to

consult children and acknowledge their views (McTavish, Streelasky, & Coles, 2012; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021). Indeed, the children expressed a desire for the teacher to ‘know’ them as readers and understand their preferences in reading (see section 5.3.3). However, although consulting children about the texts they would like to read or hear might appear useful, it is perhaps not straightforward.

The decision for the teacher to read *Ratburger (2012)* by David Walliams was based on the children’s preferences (see section 5.3.3). Walliams was a popular author in Amber class; many children had personal copies of his books and the library also had a large display of his work (see section 5.3.2). However, Walliams’ work has been highlighted as somewhat unsuitable for children. Several news articles have highlighted racist and sizest elements of Walliams’ stories. For example, the first edition of The World’s Worst Children included a character called Brian Wong, Who Was Never, Ever Wrong. Brian was a Chinese character who was the "swottiest swot who ever swotted", wearing glasses and excelling in maths (Sky News, 2021). Also, ‘dads’ are often represented as “useless, fat or mean or emotionally incapacitated or dating a succession of Page 3 girls (a weird example from *Billionaire Boy*)” (Williams, 2018).

This highlights the difficulty teachers might experience when choosing suitable class novels and the extent to which children’s preferences should be considered. Teachers have a responsibility to share texts that they believe are suitable for the children in their care. To be able to choose texts that are relevant and related to children’s reading preferences and wider interests, it would seem useful for teachers to collaborate with children but also to have a good knowledge of a range of children’s fiction and authors themselves (Cremin, T. et al., 2014). They are in a position to introduce their classes to a wide variety of authors and genres and, with a

knowledge of their children's reading preferences, also be able to make personal recommendations. It is not enough that teachers read widely if it is only adult fiction. For teachers to effectively support reading for pleasure and provide suitable book recommendations, they will need to read children's books too (Cremin, T. et al., 2009). A final point regarding reading aloud was its status as part of the reading curriculum. Although it was valued by the children, time for sessions was limited (see section 5.4.3).

As discussed in section 5.4.3, reading aloud sessions were not timetabled and often occurred at the end of the day, sometimes offered as a reward if children tidied up the classroom quickly. As such the sessions rarely lasted longer than 10 minutes leaving little or no time for discussion and sometimes sessions were cancelled. During the course of the year, only three books were read aloud, limiting the children's exposure to new texts and authors. For children who are restricted to staged texts, opportunities to experience a broader range of texts would seem essential if they are to be given the chance to read widely and for pleasure. Additionally, for children who have yet to develop fluent decoding skills, reading aloud can provide them with access to texts beyond their decoding ability. The lack of value placed on reading aloud by the school concurs with findings from Hempel-Jorgensen et al., (2018). They found that schools who claimed to have invested in developing reading for pleasure did in fact adopt a performative pedagogy where reading aloud was not timetabled and did not occur regularly. Another activity valued by the children was independent reading.

Independent or 'free' reading was valued by the children and its inclusion within the guided reading timetable (subsequent to its removal) was the only official time allocated to reading with self-selected texts where the purpose was 'pleasure'

without any further associated tasks (see section 5.4.2). The removal of independent reading was met with disappointment and was based on the teacher's perception that it involved 'talk' rather than 'reading'. As reported in section 5.4.2, the children *did* engage in talk but this was often related to the texts they were reading. A view of independent reading as a silent activity may overlook opportunities for social reading. Hempel-Jorgensen et al. (2018) suggest that teachers can have low expectations of independent reading and do not value the interaction which may foster active engagement. Whilst research has recognised that children may value a quiet environment when reading independently (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004), talk can provide opportunities for children to make links with their background knowledge and other texts (Hall, Katrina W., Hedrick, & Williams, 2014) and can encourage reading for pleasure, giving children the chance to develop their thoughts and opinions (Cremin, T. et al., 2009).

Following the removal of independent reading, opportunities for children to engage with self-selected texts were limited to the few minutes that might be available before and after official lessons. This fragmentary approach to an activity that is considered central to developing reading for pleasure seemed to suggest that such engagements were arbitrary. It may be the case that, without the reassurance of decoding practice or written outcomes, independent reading lacked proof of engagement, understanding or skill development. In an environment of accountability, this may be difficult for the teacher to justify. As outlined in section 2.1.4, the benefits of reading for pleasure are far-reaching however, these might not necessarily be evident to teachers in the short term.

It was perhaps unsurprising that the children considered reading for pleasure to be associated with reading at home rather than in school (see section 5.2.3). At home,

children would have more agency with control over text choice, who to read and interact with and where to read whereas schooled reading focused primarily on decoding and finding the true meaning of a text selected by the teacher. This is concerning when reading for pleasure is part of the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013) and *The Reading Framework* (DfE, 2021) with research supporting a range of academic and non-academic benefits (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Cliff Hodges, 2010; DfE, 2012; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Sullivan, 2015; The Reading Agency, 2015). However, where schools and teachers are influenced by pressures related to high-stakes testing, it is perhaps understandable that reading activities and approaches that focus more visibly on isolated skill development are privileged over those that relate to reading for pleasure. In an era of high accountability, teachers perhaps feel pressure to focus on test preparation rather than understanding and knowledge (Hutchings, 2015) and decisions made in the classroom are more likely to be based on understandings of reading that focus on proficiency rather than the development of reading for pleasure (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018).

6.4.1 Pleasure reader

The understanding of what constituted a pleasure reader was somewhat traditional. Independent reading (the only timetabled session for children to read with self-selected texts) was understood by the teacher as a silent activity, performed in isolation with physical texts. This view is not uncommon (Collins, Dargan, Walsh, & Merga, 2022) and supports the 'traditionalist' notion of what reading should look like (Burnett & Merchant, 2018). This perception may be easier for teachers to justify. The merits of immersing oneself in a text in this manner have been highlighted in research; children who read more, tend to enjoy reading and be more motivated, leading to improved reading skills (the Matthew Effect) (Stanovich, 1986) and

reading children's literature has the ability to enrich children's lives and their future lives as adults (Birr Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Cliff Hodges, 2010). However, this 'traditionist' (Burnett & Merchant, 2018) view of reading may be somewhat limited.

When judgements are made about what constitutes a 'real' reader - in this case, someone who reads in silence - there is a risk that children who do not conform to this preferred style might be considered as "not really a reader at all" (Mackey, M., 2022, p.103). Those who might prefer to read in short bursts, interspersing their reading with inside-text talk, are not recognised as successful. Children's identities can be developed through conversations, opportunities for discussions, interpretations and criticisms (Hodges, 2009) and talking about texts can support the development of communities of readers (Safford, 2014). For children to develop as independent readers, Mackey, M. (2014) believes that teachers should be more relaxed about their approaches to reading and endeavour to trust children's decision-making. If engagement with reading is the goal, this would appear to be more likely if children were provided with high-interest texts and time for discussion (Hall, Katrina W. et al., 2014).

It was also interesting to note that in this study, reading for pleasure was associated with printed text. It might be argued that reading for pleasure is a much broader concept involving activities such as internet searches, video gaming and the use of social media (Burnett & Merchant, 2018). These engagements might be quite different from the solitary engagement expected in Amber class and, as Burnett and Merchant suggest, could range from "immersive to lightweight, sustained to ephemeral, individual to collective, serious to flippant involving anything from momentary hilarity to deep engagement" (2018, p.66). They outline how pleasure in

reading involves the relationship between people, places, texts and things in a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1982) which is provisional and continuously changing.

An approach involving digital media which is open to discussion and interpretation may, however, sit uneasily with the current educational climate where reading is presented as a hierarchical, linear path with standardised levels and outcomes. While correlations have been attempted between reading children's literature and attainment (see Clark & Rumbold, 2006), the way we engage with digital media is constantly changing making it almost impossible to identify long-term educational benefits of any particular activity or approach. As Merchant suggests, it is a "fuzzy concept" that has different meanings for different people and this 'fuzziness' makes it difficult to quantify (2021, p.97). It may also be that internet safety is a concern for schools and teachers who are responsible for safeguarding children. However, where everyday life involves internet use with fake news and sites that are not safe, it would appear that teaching children how to use technology and read critically online is increasingly important (Merchant, 2021).

6.5 Summary

In Amber class, the children recognised the importance of making progress in reading and valued the activities and strategies used by the school and their teacher. This led the children to prioritise certain forms of reading and materials that they perceived to support progress and individual achievement (Ball, 2003). The children knew their place in the reading hierarchy and understood the importance of making progress by reading physical texts matched to their reading ability. Being able to accurately answer questions about a text was also considered to be a valuable skill rather than using personal interpretations. Written text was privileged and non-fiction was thought to be more important than fiction in relation to answering questions.

Research into the effects of neoliberalism considers the influence that such a culture can have in today's classrooms and, as Lambirth (2011) suggests, it "highlights the supremacy of the individual, the market, rationality, efficiency and the individual acquisition of skills" (p.98). In such an environment, children respond to teaching and learning to help them negotiate their options in relation to education and future employment. The use of a 'test-centric' approach along with an understanding of reading as hierarchical, appeared to encourage the normalisation of such a culture (Nairn & Higgins, 2007; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Wilkins, 2012a; Wilkins, 2012b). The consequences of this approach seemed to lead pupils to view their achievements in comparison to others, creating an element of competition which, in turn, affected their identities as readers; they felt responsible for their progress and shame when discussing their position.

Certain reading identities were made more available than others. The identities of staged and accurate readers were central to the activities and strategies used by the teacher whereas the identity of pleasure reader appeared less important. The children were keen to become 'free' readers as this led to increased access to texts and was associated with intelligence. In keeping with neoliberal principles, children assumed individual responsibility for developing the necessary skills required to 'pass' each stage and reach this end goal. However, this was not straightforward. Staged readers were restricted to certain materials which may have hindered their opportunities to make progress and were also required to manage the emotional consequences associated with being labelled as a staged reader. The identity of accurate reader required children to limit their personal interpretations of texts and accept a passive role where power was associated with the text. Aesthetic reading

(Rosenblatt, 1986) was considered unhelpful and children who engaged in more collaborative and social ways with texts were considered deviant.

Reading for pleasure was valued by the children and teacher, however, time and resources for the development of this area were restricted. The removal of independent reading severely limited the children's opportunities to choose, read and discuss self-selected texts and although the school provided impressive selections of books in the library with engaging displays, these seemed to frustrate the children as readers as they were either denied access or struggled to locate suitable texts. Without sufficient attention to the children's ability to access reading materials, along with guidance from teachers, it would appear that the school's commitment to providing a wide choice of books was somewhat futile.

The focus on reading in school as a skill to be taught, measured, evaluated and improved seemed to lead to a disparity between reading at home and school and it was perhaps understandable that reading for pleasure was associated more with reading at home. Aspects of home reading included choice of text, location and companion whereas reading in school appeared to be associated with becoming a passive reader with targets based on skill development. Where schools present reading as a linear path to success achieved through reading books of increasing difficulty and answering questions about a text correctly, it would seem logical that children understand schooled reading as a skill to be improved rather than a pleasure to be enjoyed. The identity of pleasure reader, although an offering in the earlier part of the year, was severely restricted by the end of the study and was perhaps not a realistic option for most children.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Implications

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will draw together the findings from the study and outline possible ways forward. I will discuss my contribution to knowledge, the implications of the study and opportunities for further research. This study examined children's experiences, thoughts and feelings in relation to reading in a Year 5 classroom. I looked to explore the value attached to aspects of schooled reading and considered how children were positioned by the practices employed in the school. I also examined the significance of the reading activities and strategies used by the teacher in terms of the children's developing reading identities. The original focus of the study shifted from an interest in 'struggling' readers to considering children's views and opinions about reading. As such, this thesis privileged the children's perceptions about reading in school; what it is and how it is taught.

Children in this study recognised what a good reader looked like; someone who had developed the necessary skill set to perform well in exams. To be successful readers, children accepted the requirement to improve decoding skills using physical texts; an approach to reading that had become normalised. Considering that reading in everyday life is now much more of a multimodal skill including the use of digital texts, this is worrying. However, the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013) and SATs seem to reinforce this narrow understanding of what counts as reading which does little to support other, more expansive views that include a wider variety of texts, strategies and activities.

The public nature of staged reading and the children's references to their levels, aligned with the language of testing and contributed to the understanding of reading

as hierarchical. This supports the notion that reading is something that can be measured and contributes to the high-stakes testing agenda in England. To make progress, the children prioritised the importance of decoding, recognising other texts, such as picture books, as inferior. Additionally, in preparation for exams, children understood texts to have 'fixed' meanings with little room for opinion and interpretation. Although reading for pleasure is a statutory requirement in England (DfE, 2013) and was valued by the children, activities enjoyed by the children were either limited or removed from the timetable altogether.

Moss (2021) suggests that the influence of high-stakes testing has led to the curriculum being broken down into its component parts which are then taught in isolation. The children in Amber class considered their work as a reader in relation to the reading hierarchy and their performance in comprehension exercises. They understood the discourses of neoliberal performativity and lived an "existence of calculation" as they responded to the "targets, indications and evaluations" (Ball, 2003, p.215).

7.2 Contribution to knowledge

In this section, I will explore the following two contributions of the study:

1. It provides insights into what reading becomes for children in a Year 5 class against a backdrop of high-stakes testing and policy that focuses primarily on reading as a skill to be taught, measured and evaluated.

2. Against a background of public and academic debate about the teaching of reading it provides insights into what children experience, think and feel about reading.

As explored in Section 2.5, previous work exploring children's perspectives has highlighted the importance of the reading experience, recognising that having free choice of texts is key. Studies also pointed to the children's preferences for reading at home and considered their development as readers. By foregrounding children's voices, this study provided insight into the areas of schooled reading that children in a Year 5 class considered important. The study demonstrated that, where there is a focus on measurable outcomes, the choice of activities and strategies in school can lead to a narrow view of reading and what it means to be a reader (Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt, 2021). In a climate of high-stakes testing, where reading is often viewed as a skill to be tested, measured and evaluated (Moss, 2017), this study considered children's perceptions of the reading curriculum as it was delivered in their classroom. As Mackey (2003) suggests, the need for children's views to be heard is timely as it can offer an in-depth understanding of the roles of the reader, text and context. An ethnographic perspective allowed for these views to be heard and helped to challenge the simplistic view of literacy (Street, 2011).

Building on studies that privilege children's views and opinions (Scherer, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Reedy & Carvalho, 2020; Hodges, 2010) this study demonstrated that children are able to articulate their thoughts, beliefs and feelings in relation to schooled reading. The participatory method of photo-elicitation supported the children in selecting aspects of the reading curriculum that were pertinent to them, providing ownership over the topics discussed. As Torre and Murphy (2015) suggest, such an approach can be empowering for participants as they work with the researcher regarding the design of the study. Additionally, the use of interviews involving peer groups, such as those adopted by Wilkinson et al. (2020), provided opportunities for the children to consider and debate the activities

and strategies used by their teacher and the school in an informal manner with fellow pupils. This approach supports the view that children are agentic social actors, able to discuss and reflect on their experiences of the social world in which they participate (James, et al.,1998). Supporting Tennent's (2020) claim that reading is often presented as a hierarchical skill to be measured, the children in Amber class understood that schooled reading had 'fixed' meanings and progress was achieved through improved decoding; a linear path to success which was framed as 'free' reader. This had consequences for the reading identities available to the children. I will now consider in more depth the key points raised by the children and will discuss how these findings contribute to the existing research highlighted in this thesis.

Where time and attention are given to activities and strategies by the teacher and school, it is understandable that children will view such tasks as valuable in their reading journey. Guided reading was the only timetabled reading session in Amber class and activities generally required children to answer questions about a given text (group novel, past exam paper or worksheet) correctly. As such, the children understood that texts had 'fixed' meanings. This approach could be considered 'test-centric' with an emphasis on finding the 'truth' and answering questions correctly (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018). For example, this builds on previous research into guided reading (Fisher, 2008; Phillips, 2013; & Skidmore et al., 2003) whereby tasks encouraged children to find pre-determined answers to texts. This finding reinforces a view of reading where the power is with the text rather than the reader, described by Rosenblatt (1978; 1986) as 'efferent' reading. It is assumed that texts have true or accurate meanings and the role of the reader is diminished. The approaches used in Amber class may have served to reduce the children's agency in reading, leading to an understanding that texts are not open to opinion and interpretation. This may

have devalued their role in the reading process, positioning them passively and encouraging a limited view of the complexities of reading comprehension (Duke, 2005; Tennent, 2014). In a climate of high-stakes testing, approaches such as this support the neo-liberal agenda (Jaegar, 2017) where children, teachers and schools are held to account through examinations such as SATs. Agreement with a particular viewpoint is the preferred outcome rather than developing personal opinions and views (Simpson & Cremin, T., 2022). The children also recognised the value of decoding fluently as an essential aspect of becoming a successful reader.

The use of a staged approach to reading at Rainside supported the children's understanding of reading as hierarchical. Improvements in decoding skills allowed for progress along a linear path with the status of 'free' reader as the end goal. Similar to Levy's (2009b) study with 3- to 5-year-olds, the children in Amber class believed that it was important to read texts matched to their designated stage and that texts from higher stages would be 'too difficult'. Restricting children to a limited range of texts pitched at their perceived reading ability offers a narrow understanding of the purposes of reading, where the focus is on skill practice rather than personal interest. This approach also served to prevent staged readers from developing skills relating to choosing texts.

The books available to 'staged' readers were limited in number and range, hindering the children's ability to develop preferences for particular authors or genres. Being able to make genuine choices in reading is an important part of becoming a reader and can support reading for pleasure (Arixpe et al., 2013; Cremin, T. et al., 2014; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021). Children choosing from the staged boxes had little opportunity to develop their browsing skills as the boxes contained only a limited selection of texts. Restricting children's reading options in this way led to children

feeling ‘stuck’; without access to texts that interested or motivated them to read, they felt powerless to improve their position. Understandably, children in this situation experienced a degree of frustration and this was evident in their attempts to bypass the system and choose the books that they really wanted to read from the library and from home. However, for staged readers, access to the school library was forbidden so this approach required them to act against the school rules. Also, although reading books from home might allow children to access texts based on choice rather than stage, this option might not be available to everyone. As Cremin, T. and Simpson (2022) point out, readers who are restricted by schemes can become stuck in a continuous loop of disadvantage. It would seem that strict adherence to a hierarchical scheme can serve to restrict readers rather than empower them, limiting their opportunities to develop a range of reading identities relating to personal interests and preferences (McCarthey & Moje, 2002).

Although the completion of all stages led to free choice from the school library, this achievement was not without issue. Having access to the school library did not necessarily support children in widening their knowledge of a range of authors and genres. ‘Free’ readers struggled to develop preferences, experiencing the library as vast and difficult to navigate. Being able to navigate a library is a skill that needs to be learned (Mackey, A. et al., 2022) and without time to browse and guidance from experienced readers, it was perhaps unsurprising that the children’s discussions related to a limited range of authors such as David Walliams, Roald Dahl, Jaqueline Wilson and J.K.Rowling. Additionally, although library displays might be understood as useful in terms of introducing children to new authors and genres, this opportunity was missed as the displays were limited to a few popular authors: David Walliams, Michael Morpurgo, J.K.Rowling, A.A.Milne, Roald Dahl and Jacqueline Wilson. This

provides further support for research findings suggesting that primary teachers' knowledge of children's literature is limited to a narrow range of authors (Cremin, T. et al., 2008; Cremin, T. et al., 2014). The impact of library selections and displays would appear to be minimal if insufficient attention is given to supporting children's abilities to access materials or where displays simply confirm their limited knowledge of children's writers, without introducing them to new authors and genres. The purpose of creating an environment such as this might be considered more in terms of aesthetics than inspiring children's passions for reading.

The presentation of reading as 'goal-oriented' in this study suggested that becoming a 'successful' reader was something that could be achieved through practice; progress in reading was presented as measurable (Falchi & Friedman, 2015), an approach that aligns with the view of identity development as linear (O'Brien et al., 2009) leading to a consistent and stable self (Moje & Luke, 2009). The children believed it was their individual responsibility to improve and expressed a 'desire' to become a 'free' reader, accepting their role as neoliberal subjects who could be measured and tested. Considering that many children viewed success in reading to be linked with their future life chances in relation to exams, employment prospects and wealth, this approach seemed to place pressure on children to value and pay attention to certain aspects of reading at the expense of other, more affective engagements with texts. A focus on decoding skills appeared to lead them to devalue other texts involving images such as picture books, with no mention of texts such as comics, graphic novels or film. Wider reading skills involving images were discussed by the children however, although they enjoyed looking at images, they regarded these as unimportant or suitable for younger children. It would seem that the children's view of what counts as reading in school became very narrow,

focusing primarily on written text. Considering the understanding that reading now involves digital devices and texts (OECD, 2019) and that digital literacy is the "new normal" (Merchant, 2021, p.97), this is a worrying finding. As Burnett and Merchant (2018a) point out, approaches that focus primarily on print-based literacies, do not necessarily reflect the complexities in children's everyday lives and the absence of instruction relating to critical evaluation of online texts may leave children ill-equipped to engage with the demands of the world beyond school (McTavish, 2009; Metcalfe et al., 2013).

The activities and strategies used at Rainside also supported an understanding that success in reading was linked to intelligence. This view was perhaps based on the hierarchical organisation of guided reading groups and stages. In line with neo-liberal principles, children were measured, evaluated and positioned according to their perceived reading ability and this led to opportunities for comparison (Leys, 2003). The children understood that those in 'higher' groups were 'clever' and 'confident' whereas words such as 'stupid' and 'rubbish' were used for those who were perceived to be struggling. Such labelling might be positive for those who have achieved the status of 'free' reader but for those who read from the staged boxes or were placed in a 'lower ability' group for guided reading, their positioning caused "emotional pain" (Geldard & Geldard, 1997, p.71). As was the case in Scherer's (2016) study (where children positioned at the bottom of the reading hierarchy developed strategies and narratives to distance themselves from the concept of intelligence) children in this study also attempted to resist the negative associations of being a 'poor' reader; they avoided tasks or developed consoling narratives (Yardely, 2008) to explain why their position was not an accurate reflection of themselves as a reader. However, although these children may have partially

rejected their staged reading identity by critiquing the approach, they continued to use the language of the schooled system. The children seemed to accept their position within the strategy and hierarchy and this position influenced their perception of themselves as readers (Robert-Homes and Kitto, 2019). Neoliberal principles of measuring subjects and pitting them against each other (Slater and Seawright, 2018) may help to motivate and encourage those positioned as 'successful' readers, but this would appear to be at the expense of those at the bottom of the reading hierarchy who suffer the damaging effects of the negative positioning. Children placed at the lower end of the scale seemed to experience low self-esteem (Archer et al., 2018; Campbell, 2015; McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020; Taylor et al., 2019) and their levels of engagement and motivation were reduced (Glasswell & Ford, 2011; Caldwell & Leslie, 2003).

Recent findings suggest that the role of reading for pleasure in schools is often limited when schools adopt a performative pedagogy, particularly in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage (Hemple-Jorgensen et al., 2018). This study contributes to these findings and highlights how a teacher in a school with low levels of socio-economic disadvantage (and who was an avid reader himself) also adopted a performative approach to reading. Elements of reading for pleasure such as independent reading and reading aloud were significant areas of interest for the children.

The removal of the free-read (or independent reading) session featured prominently in the children's discussions of reading in school. Their enthusiasm for the activity in the first set of interviews contrasted sharply with their disappointment at its removal in the interviews conducted later in the academic year. 'Free' reading provided the only timetabled opportunity for the children to read for pleasure and to choose books

freely from the library. The decision to remove it from the timetable would appear to suggest that independent reading was not an important element of the reading curriculum, a finding reported in other research (Clark & De Zoysa, 2011; Cremin, T. et al., 2014; Kucirkova & Cremin, 2018; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021). The remaining options for the children to read for pleasure were restricted to non-timetabled periods before and after lessons. This appears to reinforce the view that independent reading is little more than a 'filler' between sessions; an activity suitable for helping children to settle down after breaks or at the start of the day. The lack of timetabled sessions conveys the message that opportunities for children to engage with texts of their own choosing for the purpose of pleasure are less important than reading from teacher-selected texts and completing associated written work.

The removal of independent reading in this study was based on the teacher's perception that it involved 'talk' rather than 'reading'. This seems to suggest that the social nature of reading was not valued by the teacher. As reported in section 5.4.2, the children did engage in talk but this was often related to the texts they were reading. Whilst research has recognised that children may value a quiet environment when reading independently (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004), talk can provide opportunities for children to make links with their background knowledge and other texts (Hall, Hedrick, & Williams, 2014); it can encourage reading for pleasure, giving children a chance to develop their thoughts and opinions (Cremin, T. et al., 2009). Talking about texts can support the development of communities of readers (Safford, 2014). Hempel-Jorgensen et al., (2018) suggested that teachers can have low expectations of independent reading and do not value the interaction which may foster active engagement and this appeared to be the case at Rainside; reading seemed to be

understood as an individual and silent activity rather than a chance to develop engage more fully with a text through engagement with others.

Reading aloud to children was another aspect of the reading for pleasure agenda (Cremin, T. et al., 2014) raised by the children. Reading aloud can offer teachers the opportunity to role model being a reader, introduce new authors and genres and share the collective enjoyment of reading with the class. However, these outcomes were not fully realised in this study. The reading aloud sessions in Amber class were not officially timetabled, sometimes cancelled and when they did go ahead, the time allocated was usually less than 10 minutes, findings supported by wider research (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). Although a statutory requirement included in the NC (2013) and *The Reading Framework* (2021), reading aloud appeared to be more in line with Ofsted's (HMI, 1996) findings that described it as an optional extra providing relaxation at the end of the day rather than a central element of the reading curriculum.

The lack of time allocated to reading aloud during the year limited the opportunities for children to engage with texts which match their comprehension level or with texts they would not normally choose such as non-fiction or poetry. This was particularly relevant for children who struggled with decoding skills or who had limited access to books both in school and at home. Reading aloud and audiobooks may provide children with access to texts beyond their decoding ability thereby widening the range of genres and authors available to them (Goodwin, 1995). For children who are limited to staged texts, opportunities to experience a broader range of texts would seem essential if children are to be given the chance to read widely and for pleasure, as recommended in the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013).

The findings from this study also support the understanding that teacher's choices for reading aloud should be carefully considered. To be able to make good choices, it would appear important for teachers to have a wide knowledge of texts (Cremin, T. et a., 2008; Cremin, T. et al., 2014). Texts that were relevant and related to children's reading preferences and wider interests seemed to prove engaging whereas texts based on the teacher's preferences seemed less appealing. The children also enjoyed 'funny' texts, a finding supported by Ledge and Merga (2019). The children were keen for their teacher to know about them as readers and if the curriculum is to value children's interests, it may be useful to consult children and acknowledge their views (McTavish et al., 2012; Reedy & De Carvalho, 2021).

For reading to be considered worthwhile, the children in this study believed that it should be associated with written work. Such sessions were described in the interviews as 'real' work and 'important' and were often viewed negatively by the children, a finding supported by Hempel-Jorgensen et al. (2018). The lack of value afforded to independent reading and reading aloud may relate to the absence of a written output as evidence of engagement which could be allocated a mark or score. Accountability is an important aspect of the neoliberal agenda (Jaegar, 2017) and this finding provides evidence that teachers under pressure to deliver improved outcomes prioritise activities that provide written evidence of engagement aligned with those of SATs over those related to reading for pleasure where outcomes are not quantifiable.

The findings from this study suggested that there was a shared understanding between teachers and children that reading involved physical texts where independent reading should be silent and solitary. This supports a traditionalist understanding of reading as an isolated and sustained activity (Burnett & Merchant

2018b; Collins et al., 2022). The use of past papers and worksheets also supported the view that texts are provided by authority and that their purpose is for instruction rather than being connected to the children's interests (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018). Where schools and teachers continue to support approaches such as these, children are effectively denied the opportunity to recognise the wider views of reading including multimodal and digital texts.

This study demonstrates how the activities and strategies selected by the teacher and school serve to position the children in certain ways. In such an environment, I argued that the reading identities available to the children were limited to those that aligned with the cognitive skills of reading. The children appeared to accept the importance of schooled reading in relation to their life chances and, in line with neoliberal principles, they understood that it was their responsibility to make progress. In an environment such as this, rather than the children becoming active readers who assume control over the process (Hobsbaum et al., 2006) the children seemed to be positioned passively. It is perhaps, therefore, unsurprising that children perceived reading in school to be different from reading at home. Schooled reading that focuses primarily on decoding and finding the true meaning of a text, perhaps fails to recognise and value children's home reading practices and preferences (Levy, 2011). Supporting the findings of Reedy and Carvalho (2019), reading away from school seemed to provide opportunities for children to have the freedom to choose where, when and what to read whereas reading in school seemed to limit many of their options. As Parry and Taylor (2018) suggest, this disparity can lead to divisions between home and schooled reading.

7.3 Implications

There are a number of implications arising from this study. Where there is a narrow focus on developing reading skills, it would perhaps be helpful to reflect on the limitations of approaches that focus on reading as a linear path and consider reading more widely. The following suggestions have implications for all those involved in decisions relating to schooled reading including teachers, schools and the government.

Teaching and learning are more than acquiring skills or transferring knowledge or natural growth; they involve building identities and cultures, communities and institutions. Luke, Allan and Freebody (1999) argue that failure at literacy is not about individual skill deficits, rather it is about access and apprenticeship into institutions and resources, discourses and texts. These ideas resonate with the findings of my study because the children's experiences of reading in this study focused primarily on reading as a skill, considering their own successes and failures in relation to the reading hierarchies presented to them.

Comber and Kamler (2004) suggest that teachers themselves are best placed to challenge this deficit discourse. They found that when teachers moved out of the deficit discourse, where teachers, pupils or families are apportioned blame, to changed pedagogies that go beyond simply 'linking' out-of-school and in-school literacy practices, sustained learning outcomes were achieved. These learning outcomes could then be transferred to the curriculum. This involved significantly repositioning children with respect to the "production and comprehension of texts" to allow them to do "identity work" as well as "acquire new repertoires of literacy practice" (2004, p.307). Teachers are therefore "challenged to create contexts in which a student experiences success" (Triplett, 2004). If we are to develop a range

of reading identities for all children, it may be useful to offer reading instruction that focuses on more than just skills (Hall, L, A., 2012) where teachers collaborate with children to help them decide what type of reader they would like to be (Evans, 2011).

It is important for teachers to provide children with a range of opportunities to become successful readers. Although staged reading and comprehension exercises might support their proficiency in reading, they may also serve to limit the way in which children can construct themselves as readers. This might be achieved through the use of a range of texts, texts of different complexities, flexible grouping and opportunities for interaction. It may also prove useful to consider children's views and opinions of these approaches, thereby empowering them to become agentic rather than passive readers. Such a change will require those in power to be adaptable and open to new ideas about what counts as reading. For children to develop positive reading identities, the acceptance of a reading hierarchy combined with an understanding of texts as having fixed meanings needs to be challenged. This should perhaps begin with assessments.

As explored in this study, the children used the information provided by assessments to define themselves as readers. As such, it would seem important that alternative methods for monitoring children's progress are considered. This would perhaps require a move away from approaches that offer a limited view of 'what reading is' as this can limit the types of readers children can become. Instead of allowing external assessments to frame children's reading experiences, teachers could use approaches that encourage dialogic engagement with a wide variety of texts, leading to a range of opinions and interpretations. This may require teachers to revisit their understanding of comprehension practices and, rather than allowing testing arrangements to justify their teaching, base their decisions on the most suitable

approaches in relation to the needs of their class. Teachers and schools, however, are restricted in the decisions they can make in an era of high-stakes testing where outcomes define a teacher's or child's success. In such an environment, it is perhaps understandable that teachers become "alienated from understanding their unique human role" in the process (Goouch & Lambirth, 2007, p.84). This is particularly telling in this study where a teacher who is an avid reader privileges activities and strategies that support skill development with little consideration for reading for pleasure and wider practices. Changes to external testing arrangements and how outcomes are shared need to be considered.

Moss recommends that "[t]he architecture of high-stakes testing needs to be dismantled" (2017, p.63). It is time to develop an approach that informs practices and shares information with parents and carers about the teaching decisions made to support children in school other than through published SATs. As Tennent argues, "there is little to be gained from putting a score on comprehension" (2020, p.492); SATs provide only partial evidence and relate to areas of the curriculum that can be tested and inferences made from the tests are questionable. An alternative approach should reflect the local context and, as Oakley suggests, it should do the "most benefit and least harm" for those in school (Oakley, 2000, p.19). It would, therefore, perhaps be more appropriate to use teacher assessments. These can account for reader's identities. Ellis and Smith propose the following model:

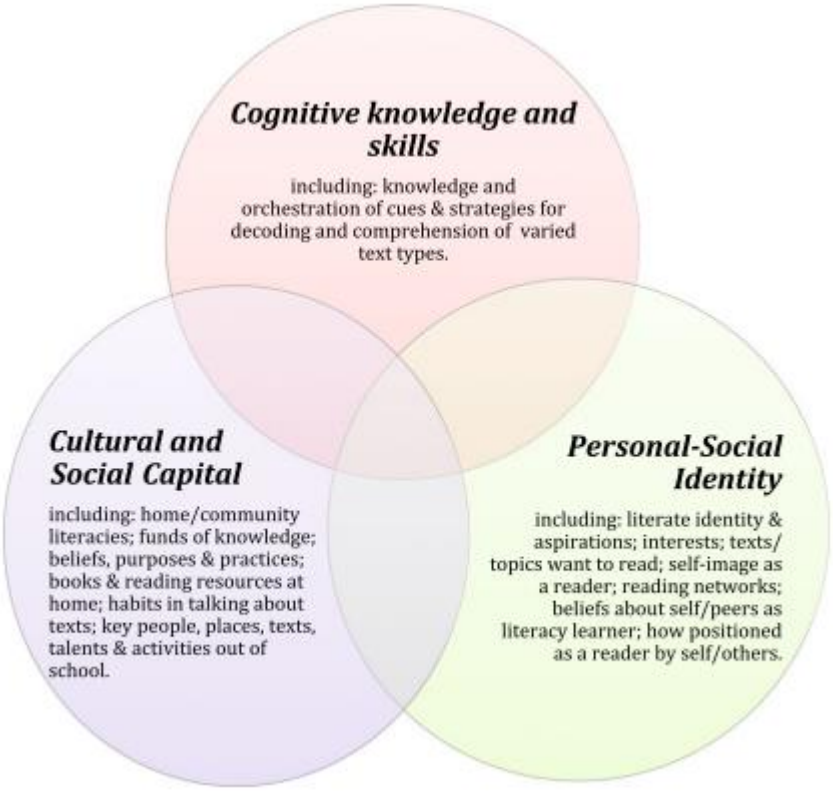


Figure 36 The three knowledge domains as a boundary object situating literacy as a cognitive, cultural & social/emotional practice.

Such an approach would encourage an understanding that, although it is important to develop reading skills, it is also important to recognise that these skills "are inseparable from the social contexts of families, homes and communities" (Ellis & Smith, 2017, p.85). Reading assessment in this model allows for an understanding of a range of reading practices and texts to be used in ways that are relevant to a particular context. Children's reading identities can be valued and encouraged and different approaches to engagement with texts can be explored.

This study also highlighted a number of issues associated with choice, linked not just to the availability of books but also to the teacher's ability to make recommendations and the children's confidence in making their own choices. In light of this, to broaden children's understanding of reading and themselves as readers, it would be helpful for schools and teachers to use a wider range of texts. Recognising the pressure on

teachers, it would perhaps be beneficial for schools to employ librarians. A librarian with a comprehensive knowledge of texts and approaches to reading could provide children with the advice, support and encouragement needed for them to develop as readers. Librarians may also have a different view of reading; where teachers have responsibility for children's performance, they may feel pressured to value certain texts and activities more than others. Librarians would be free to advise children about suitable texts based solely on quality and the appropriateness for the reader.

To encourage children to broaden the range of physical books they engage with, it may be helpful for schools to consider how language is used. In Amber class, the children used the language of the staged approach to describe themselves and the texts. This perhaps minimised the complexity of texts to a simple level and dismissed other considerations such as genre, author, title and blurb. An oversimplified approach such as staged reading may seem straightforward but might in fact lead children to an oversimplified view of reading and of themselves as readers. Also, rather than limiting these children to texts based on their decoding ability, it may be useful to increase the range of texts to accommodate the children's preferences; when texts are of high interest, children can display enjoyment and persistence even if texts are considered too difficult (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). The focus on decoding had further implications in terms of diminishing the value of images.

The lack of value regarding picture books appeared to overlook the complexities of such texts. There are a wide variety of picture books published every year, both fiction and non-fiction, with differing approaches in terms of the interplay between text and image which can be termed simple or complex. Simple picture books with words and images that complement each other (such as those used in scheme books) provide a complete message with few gaps for the reader's input; in such

instances, the reader remains passive (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000). However, when words and images begin to provide alternative information or contradict each other in some way (complex picture books) the book becomes open to a range of interpretations. A reader's 'past experience' and 'present personality' come together with a text to create a new experience that is unique to that reader (Rosenblatt, 1978). Complex picture books offer children an opportunity to develop their understanding of reading as an 'investigative process' requiring determination and perseverance (Serafini, 2005). Arizpe (2003) argues that the process of analysing a visual text and considering the relationship between image and word is a complex skill that is not fully recognised in the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013). She suggests that national policies pay 'lip-service' to the use of images to explore multi-layered texts and that picture books are used for isolated, time-limited activities such as grammar and phonics. The lack of any reference to digital texts in relation to reading (other than videos used as a stimulus for writing) was also a concern.

The definition of being literate in the twenty-first century has expanded and diversified and now incorporates digital literacy (Merchant, 2021). As outlined in section 2.1.3.1, many children begin school knowing how to use laptops and tablets (Marsh et al., 2015) and the view of reading as an individual, sustained activity appears to have changed (Liu, 2005). Digital forms of literacy such as social networking, email and the use of the internet require consumers to develop the necessary skills to engage critically with online text so that they are able to engage fully in society (Brown, 2016; McTavish, 2009; McTavish et al., 2012; Metcalfe et al., 2013). Texts presented online might use different reading pathways providing readers with the option to read in a non-linear fashion (Walsh, 2006) whilst also incorporating a range of auditory and visual dimensions to communicate information.

The way that modes interact supports the meaning-making process (Jewitt, 2012). It is perhaps the school's responsibility to ensure that children are not just limited to traditional linear texts and that reading reflects their lives outside of school where they will be required to "make connections and construct meaning with … non-linear, hyper texts" (Serafini, 2005).

To empower all children to become readers and for them to experiment with a variety of potential reading identities would also require a move away from ability grouping and the presentation of reading as a hierarchical structure. Potential identities might then acknowledge wider views of reading and include collaborative approaches. This would necessitate a change of perspective from teachers and schools and would be a huge shift in the way schools currently organise children for teaching and learning activities. In the current climate of high-stakes testing, this would seem challenging.

A possible solution might be to encourage children to become more critically literate and develop an understanding of the neoliberal framework within which they are expected to operate. As Jaeger (2017) suggests, it may be helpful for children (particularly those who consider themselves failures) to develop an understanding of reading in school as somewhat arbitrary and artificial. Rather than promoting activities and strategies that encourage comparison and individualisation, teachers might emphasise collaboration, creativity and social responsibility (Keddie, 2016).

To allow children the time and space to engage with texts and develop their own personal opinions and interpretations and value the range of understandings and interpretations relevant in the 21st century, it would seem necessary for schools and policymakers to change perspective.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

In this study, I aimed to use an ethnographic approach with thematic analysis to gain insight into children's experiences, thoughts and feelings in relation to reading. I used photo-elicitation interviews along with photographs and field notes to illustrate these views.

I recognise that I have made decisions about which data to present, selecting photographs, extracts of interviews and field notes to present in this report. In discussing the findings, I have shared my own views about the significance of what was said, what I had written and what had been photographed. These were inevitably shaped by my own experiences as a primary school teacher, author, literacy consultant and teacher educator (see section 3.3.7.2).

With minimal visits to the classroom, my accounts of the children's engagement in reading were limited. This restricted the opportunities to observe aspects of the study such as 'visual literacy'. It also meant that the focus of the study was on reading provision rather than informal 'under the desk' reading (Maybin, 2007b) or reading across the school day (see Papen, 2016). As such, this study does not comment on every aspect of reading in Amber class but focuses more on the areas that the children raised in the interviews. Therefore, the topics discussed were framed by the children themselves.

Reading in this study focused on paper-based fiction and non-fiction including both text and image. I recognise that more expansive studies of reading might address aspects such as digital media, critical literacy and multimodality. However, as the study aimed to privilege children's views and opinions about schooled reading, the

absence of wider views reflected the children's interpretations of 'what reading is' in school, rather than looking to discuss reading more widely.

Interviewing children in small groups may have restricted the opinions and views shared. The children were given the opportunity to decide who they would like to work with and these groups generally appeared to be based on friendships. As such, the children may have felt inclined to agree with peers if their opinion did not align with the popular view.

The study is not designed to be representative of other Year 5 classrooms and it is recognised that this is a unique set of individuals whose experiences, thoughts and feelings reflect their particular circumstances. I am aware that the process of analysis has been continuous and that I revisited the data on numerous occasions, adapting and editing my interpretations each time in light of new connections with other data or opportunities to relate events to wider research. As such, I do not claim to have accurately represented the children's views, rather it is my representation.

Although the study became quite critical, it was not my intention to critique the activities or strategies delivered in the school. Instead, I aimed to highlight the children's experiences, thoughts and feelings in relation to these approaches. Implications of the study and suggestions for further research are offered to illustrate the effect that a narrow conception of reading may have on children's reading identities with suggestions regarding ways forward that might lead to more agentic readers with a broader range of reading identities.

7.5 Further study

The findings from this study are based on one school in the north of England. To consider children's views more widely, it may be useful to repeat the study in

different settings, for example, schools that are part of an academy or schools in different areas. This would help to provide a broader view of how children experience, think and feel about reading more generally and take into consideration a wider range of strategies and activities perhaps exploring the significance of different approaches in terms of the organisation of reading in schools and also examining how economic, political and ideological play out in policies and resourcing decisions.

Additionally, recognising the assumption made by both me and the children that reading relates mainly to physical books, it may be helpful to explore children's views and opinions of reading more widely. This would enable understandings of a broader range of reading identities and perhaps help children to value their own personal preferences and choices more highly.

A final consideration may relate to the teacher's involvement in the study; a more collaborative approach to data generation and analysis could prove beneficial. Although I did share the initial findings with Mr Dickens before writing the report, to gain a better insight into the decision-making in the classroom, a 'design—based' approach (Zamenopoulos & Alexiou, 2018) may have been useful with built-in opportunities to work together to act on emerging findings with a view to developing reading in class. This approach could also give an insight into how teachers manage the curriculum in an environment of high-stakes testing.

7.6 Final thoughts

This study examined how children experienced, thought and felt about reading in a Year 5 class in a primary school in the north of England. It privileged their views, demonstrating that for these children, reading had become predominantly a skill-

based activity, positioning them within a reading hierarchy. Perhaps most concerning is that the teacher in this study recognised the pleasure to be gained from reading personally but struggled to find time to support the children in developing this passion. The activities and strategies minimised opportunities for children to develop a love of reading and also limited the range of reading identities available to them. If policy guidance and research relating to reading for pleasure is ignored in favour of tasks designed to improve outcomes, it is perhaps time to reconsider the use of SATs and Ofsted as an approach to assessment and monitoring.

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Appendix A

Summary of dates and times of school visits

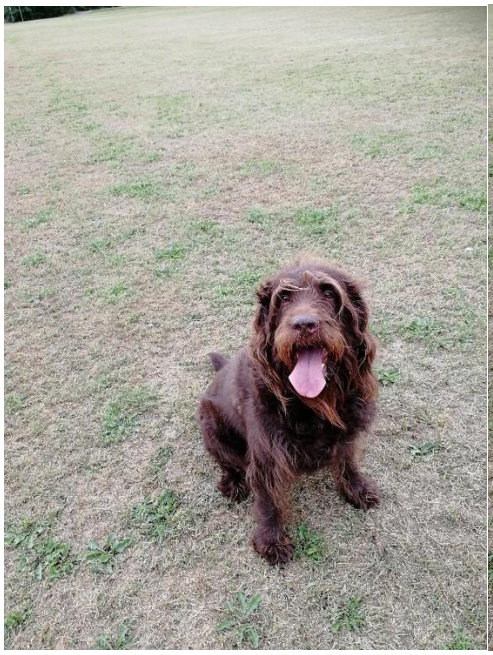
Date	Item	Details
July 2018	Contact with Mr Dickens	Emails to outline proposal
Sept 2018	Contact with Mr Dickens	Informed headteacher happy for research to go ahead
Sept 2018	Ofsted	Visit delayed due to Ofsted visit
October 2018	Meet staff and class	1 hour visit
9.11.2018	Field notes Photographs	Friday morning First day of research Writing lesson
14.11.2018	Field notes Photographs	Wednesday morning Writing lesson
20.11.2018	Field notes Photographs	Tuesday morning Supply teacher Maths Computers Maths Assembly Maths Guided reading
23.11.2018	Field notes Photographs	Friday morning Non-uniform day Writing – non-chronological reports Assembly Spellings Times Tables

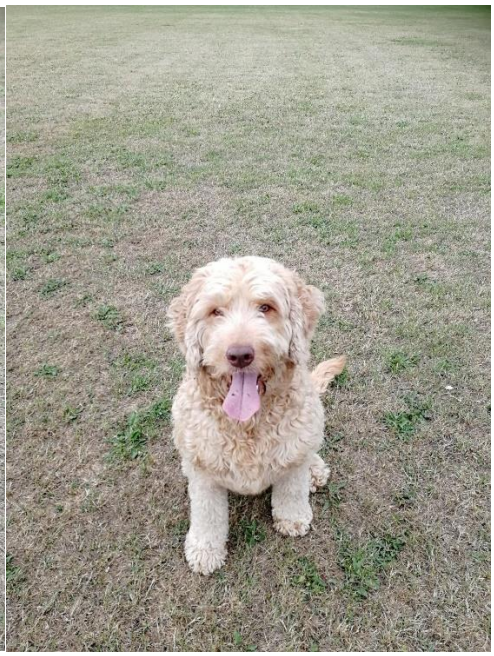
		Guided reading
3.12.2018	Field notes Photographs	Monday mid-morning until end of day Spellings Reading buddies did not happen at lunchtime Writing No time for a story
10.12.2018	Field notes 1st Interviews	Monday whole day Interviews am Reading buddies lunchtime Interviews pm Storytime 10mins
13.12.2018	1st interviews	Wednesday afternoon Interviews
18.12.2018	1st Interviews	Tuesday whole day Interviews
4.2.2019	Field notes	Monday morning Spelling Guided reading – whole class novel
25.2.2019	Field notes Photographs	Monday whole day Handwriting Writing poetry Reading comprehension Grammar and punctuation test Geography
8.3.2019	Field notes Photographs	Friday whole day Writing Assembly

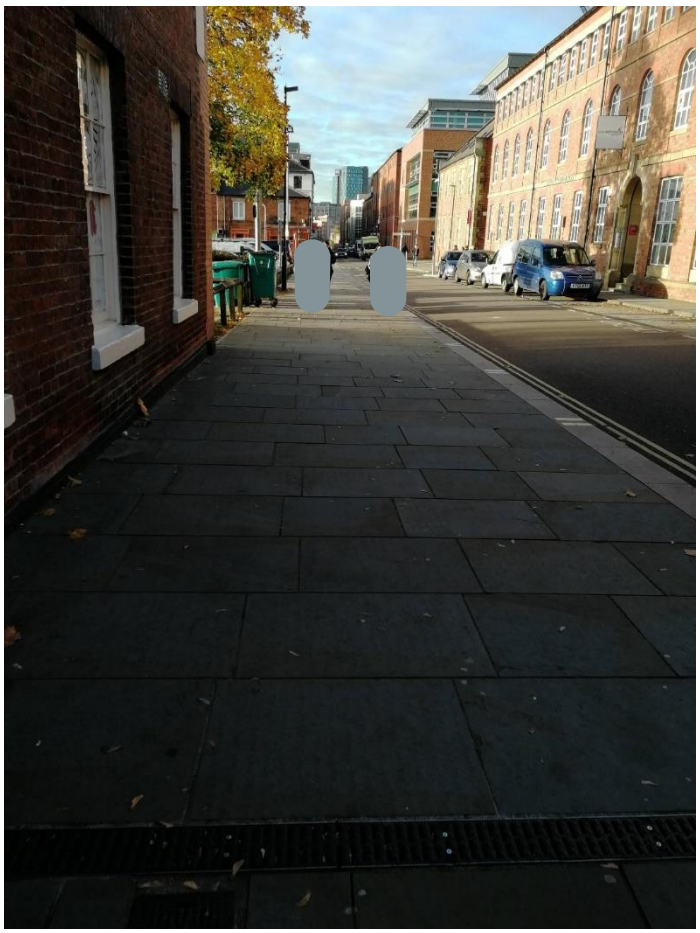
		Lunchtime – friendship group Writing Singing Storytime 10 mins
20.3.2019	Field notes Photographs	Wednesday morning Reading lesson in library
2.4.2019	Field notes Photographs	Tuesday afternoon Writing Book cover illustrations Storytime 15mins
3.6.2019	Field notes 2nd interviews	Monday morning 2nd interviews Guided reading
4.6.2019	Field notes 2nd interviews	Tuesday afternoon 2nd interviews
10.10.2019	Interview Mr Dickens	1 hour after school

Appendix B

Photos shared with children







Appendix C

Staged incidents

Mr Dickens was working with a small group and the rest of the children were working on a different task as part of the weekly guided reading rota. The group that I was sitting with were answering questions about a given text. Instead of completing the task, most of the group were sticking their hands to the table with glue or drawing pretend tattoos on their bodies. This, according to Monahan and Fisher (2010), illustrates the strength of ethnography whereby the behaviour observed could be viewed as "more valid" than other measures "because it is what cannot be contained by, or what subjects choose not to hide through self-censorship" (p.366). Such behaviour, they argue, regardless of any observer effects, "often reveal profound truths" (p.358). The children were aware of my presence and, instead of attempting to 'appear' on-task in front of an adult - behaviour I would have expected in my role as teacher – they continued with their activities, prioritising social engagement over individual task completion:

> Danny begins to glue his arm to the desk. Janine has made a mark on her arm. She shows Ellen. Ellen and Janine begin to lick their fingers and rub the marks off their arms.
>
> (Tuesday 2nd April Field Notes)

This highlighted the importance of developing trusting relationships with the children. Their behaviour suggests that they feel comfortable with me being in the classroom.

On other occasions, children appeared to *choose* the behaviour or opinion that they wanted to share with me as the researcher. For example, Billy, during a grammar test, had pretended to load a gun and shoot himself suggesting to me that he was unhappy with situation. When he noticed that I was watching, he attempted to hide

this gesture from me and share it covertly with another child on the table. Later, when I asked about tests and how they made him feel, he initially responded negatively. However, I commented in my field notes that ‘he quickly changed this response and expressed a more positive attitude’ (25th February 2019 Field Notes). These initial insights suggested that children recognised that it was perhaps more acceptable to express certain reading behaviours and opinions more than others. Although my presence may have influenced Billy’s behaviour and comments, it could be argued that Billy wished to be viewed as a reader who has a positive attitude towards tests. Alternative interpretations might be that he wished to ‘please’ the researcher who was interested in reading or to protect Mr Dickens’ role as the teacher who administered the test. These could all be considered to provide an insight into how Billy wished to adopt an identity as a reader which aligned with the kinds of reading deemed valuable at school rather than someone who found tests difficult.

Appendix D
Ethics

ER6579919; What is 'reading' in primary school?; Doxey, Cara - Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; (All other research with human participants)

Approved with Advisory Comments ··· Admin Info

Introduction | P1 - General Information * | P2 - Project Outline * | P10 - Review *

This section to be completed by Lead Reviewer (or FREC if escalated)

If you need to request that a Faculty Research Ethics Chair reviews this application, please ensure that you assign them to the record.

This is done by clicking on the blue plus icon below, entering their surname and pressing enter. Then click on the blue plus next to their name.

The Faculty Research Ethics Chairs are
ACESReza Saatchi, Marcos Rodrigues
D&SAnn Macaskill
HWBNikki Jordan-Mahy
SBSTony Lynn

If the FREC is not assigned to the application, then an email won't be sent to notify them when you save and close

Comments collated by Lead Reviewer (Or FREC if escalated)

This is a thorough and detailed application for a valuable and interesting study.
There are a couple of points to consider, firstly from the second reviewer:
I wondered whether you might want to request access to relevant documents (not otherwise in the public domain)?
Consider how participants will be briefed and debriefed about the project - including support teachers, classroom assistants, volunteers etc.
Include maximum time that you anticipate being in school on Headteacher and other adult info sheets - and you might add that this is to be negotiated. I think you say elsewhere about half a day a week.
Please ensure that supervisors' contact details are on all the information/consent forms.
Consider developing a more child friendly info/consent form, including one that covers images (there is an example image form here: https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/research-ethics-approval-procedures this will also reflect the specific age of the children participating.

1005/3950

Lead Reviewers Comments Following Resubmission

0/20000

Upload *

If you are uploading a file containing the collated feedback, please make a note in the comments box above to say "Please see attached comments".

Final Decision to be completed by Lead Reviewer (or FREC if escalated) *

Approved with advisory co

Date of Final Decision *

26/07/2018

Appendix E

DATE

Cara Doxey

Cara.doxey@student.shu.ac.uk

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am a student and lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University and I previously worked as primary school teacher.

As part of my doctoral research I am interested in reading in primary schools and ### has kindly agreed to allow me to research this at ### primary school. I am interested in finding out about children's experiences of reading both in formal lesson times and during informal breaks.

I will be looking at children in *** class across one academic year. I will spend approximately half a day in school each week from September 2018 to July 2019. I will be observing the children both in the classroom and during playtimes and I will make notes and audio recordings about what they say and do. The main findings will be published in the form of a thesis for my degree along with publications in journals and presentations at conferences.

Additionally, children will also have the opportunity to take a more active part in the research. This will involve taking photographs of items or places in school to represent 'reading': how they feel about reading; what they think about reading; and what they would like to change about reading. The children will be asked to volunteer if they would like to take part in this aspect of the research.

A summary of results will be available from October 2020. Please use the email at the top of this letter to contact me for further information after this date. I will send another letter in July 2019 to remind you of this opportunity.

After the notes have been written up, they will be store securely at Sheffield Hallam University until my degree has been completed when they will be added to the storage archive. All names will be changed, and any photographs taken will be obscured to ensure the children/school cannot be identified. Children do not have to take part in the research and may withdraw at any point, even after the data has been collected – up to three weeks afterwards (19/7/2019).

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of **public tasks that are in the public interest.** A full statement can be found at https://www.shu.ac.uk/About%20this%20website/Privacy%20policy/Privacy%20Notices/Privacy%20notice%20for%20research

However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number. Further information can be found at https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice

If you are happy for your child to take to take part, I would be grateful if you could complete the form below and return it to your class teacher in the envelope provided.

If you do not wish you child to take part in the research, that is absolutely fine. They should attend school as normal. It will simply mean that they will not be observed or recorded as part of the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me using the email address on this letter.

Many thanks

Cara Doxey

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/CARERS

Title: What is 'reading' in primary school?

Declaration of Consent

- I have been informed about the aims and procedures involved in the research project described above.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO
- I reserve the right to withdraw my/our child at any stage in the proceedings.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO
- I understand that once the data has been collected the right to withdraw will be available for three weeks until data becomes anonymised (19/7/2019).

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO
- I understand that the information gained will be anonymous and that all names/identifying documents (children, adults and the school) will be removed/obscured from any materials used in the research.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO

- Name of child:
- Name/s of parent/carer:
- Signed:
- School:
- Date:

Thank you

Appendix F

Sheffield Hallam University

INFORMATION SHEET FOR ADULTS IN SCHOOL
Title of Project: What is 'reading' in primary school?

Researcher: Cara Doxey
Supervisors: Prof. Cathy Burnett, Dr. Roberta Taylor

Please will you take part in a study about reading in primary school? This document explains why I am doing this research project and sets out what will be involved for the school.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research project is investigating children's views and experiences of reading in Key Stage 2 class in a primary school. The main findings will be published in the form of a thesis for my degree along with publications in journals and presentations at conferences. A summary of the findings will be available from October 2020. Please contact me via email for a copy - cara.doxey@student.shu.ac.uk

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep along with the consent form if you decide to take part. You can still decide to withdraw at any time without giving a reason up to three weeks after the research has finished.

Possible benefits/outcomes of the study

To further research into how children are constructed as readers in school and to consider possible implications for teaching methods, curriculum content and the wider school context. I will be looking at activities in formal lessons and during playtimes, examining how children engage with reading. For example, I might record what 'reading' is involved during a music lesson or how children use reading to organise a game at lunchtime.

What will be involved?

I will take every care to reduce to a minimum disruption to the school routine. I would like access to a Key Stage 2 class for a period of one academic year and to be able to be fully involved in all aspects of everyday school routines.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the research is unobtrusive. I will visit the school on full or half days, arranged with class teacher, throughout the year. I will observe the children and make notes, audio recordings, take photographs and collect relevant artefacts e.g. copies of song sheets in music.

Children will be asked to self-select if they wish to become involved in the participatory aspect of the research where they will take photographs of places and

items within the school grounds to represent their view about reading. These photographs will be used as part of small group discussion with myself to explore children's views about reading. The research questions are as following:

1. What reading practices do children experience in school?
2. How do children engage with these reading practices?
3. In what ways are children positioned in relation to reading practices?
4. What are the discourses around reading in school?

Children will be able to select photographs to add to a book to represent the research project. This will form part of the feedback for the children. The final week of the study will be to debrief the children and adults.

Who will run the research sessions?

I will be the researcher and I have full DBS clearance for working with children.

Will all the children's details and the assessment results be kept confidential?

Yes. All the information about participants in this study will be kept confidential and data will be anonymous. It will be stored securely on Sheffield Hallam University's storage system until I have completed my doctorate when it will be added to the storage archive.

I will not provide data about individual children to their parent/carer or other adults in school. The main findings will be published in the form of a thesis for my degree along with publications in journals and presentations at conferences.

Legal basis for research for studies

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of **public tasks that are in the public interest.** A full statement can be found at https://www.shu.ac.uk/About%20this%20website/Privacy%20policy/Privacy%20Notices/Privacy%20notice%20for%20research

However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number. Further information can be found at https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice

Contact:

If you require any further information or have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my supervisors.

Cara Doxey: cara.doxey@student.shu.ac.uk

Cathy Burnett: c.burnett@shu.ac.uk

Roberta Taylor: R.E.taylor@shu.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM FOR ADULTS IN SCHOOL

Title: What is 'reading' in primary school?

Declaration of Consent

- I have been informed about the aims and procedures involved in the research project described above.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO
- I reserve the right to withdraw at any stage in the proceedings.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO
- I understand that once the data has been collected the right to withdraw will be available for three weeks until data becomes anonymised (19/7/2019).

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO
- I understand that the information gained will be anonymous and that all names/identifying documents (children, adults and the school) will be removed/obscured from any materials used in the research.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO

- Name:
- Signed:
- School:
- Date:

Thank you

Appendix G

Child Consent Form 1 – to be read aloud

Hi, my name is Cara. I am from Sheffield Hallam University.

I would like to spend some time in your classroom to find out about the sorts of things you do around reading. This will help me with some work I am is doing.

I am going to listen to what you say and watch what you do. It isn't to make sure you behave, I just want to find out about what it is like to be in your class.

To make sure I remember everything that happens I am going to use a recorder which will record the things we say, and I will make notes about what we do.

When I write about my time at our school I am going to change your names and the name of the school and class so that no one knows who said what or where your school is. I am doing that to make sure you are safe.

In the future, perhaps about October, I am going to ask you if you would like to take some photographs of places or objects in school that might tell me something about reading – how you feel about reading, maybe something you'd like to change about reading and what you think about reading. You can be thinking about that now but it won't happen for a few weeks. You will get another chance to do this February. This will help me to understand what you think about reading in school.

If you don't want to take part in any of the research – the recordings, me taking notes or the photographs - that is absolutely fine. If you say you want to take part but change your mind that is ok as well. I will make sure I don't record what you say or write anything about you.

Could you give me a 'thumbs up' if you would like to take part or a 'thumbs down' if you wouldn't like to take part.

If anyone doesn't want to take part but they didn't feel like putting their thumbs down, could you talk to me or your teacher or maybe another adult in school sometime today and they will let me know.

I'm going to ask you again after half-term in October and then after Christmas etc. so don't feel like this is your only chance. You can change your mind at any point up until next summer – three weeks after the research has finished. I will tell you when that is nearer the time.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHILDREN IN KEY STAGE 2 CLASS
Title of Project: What is 'reading' in primary school?

Researcher: Cara Doxey
Supervisors: Prof. Cathy Burnett, Dr. Roberta Taylor

Please will you take part in a study about reading in primary school? This will explain why I am doing this research project and what will happen in school.

What is the purpose of the study?

This project will hopefully find out about your experiences and thoughts about reading in school. The information will be shared with other people who are interested in reading to help them understand more about reading in primary school. At the end of the project (July 2019) I will talk to you about what I have found out.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. You can keep this copy of this information and the consent form if you decide to take part. If you decide to take part but change your mind, that's fine - just let me, your teacher or another adult know. You can change your mind up to three weeks after the project has finished – 19th July 2019.

Possible benefits/outcomes of the study

Hopefully this project will help us to understand more about how you experience reading school and more about your thoughts and feelings about reading in school. This might help us to think about how to teach reading more effectively in the future.

What will be involved?

I will spend time in class watching what you do and listening to what you say. I will be in the class about once a week, probably on different days. Sometimes I might put an audio recorder on the desk to help me remember what is said. I will also spend time with you at break and lunch. This will help me to find out about reading at other times, not just in literacy lessons.

You will also be given the chance to tell me about reading in pairs or small groups. I will give you a camera and you can take photographs of things to do with reading then we will discuss them. You will get a chance to do this in October or February if you want to.

In the final week of the project, I will come back into school and tell you about what I have found out.

Who will run the research sessions?

I will be the researcher.

Will all the children's details and the assessment results be kept confidential?

Yes. All the information will be kept confidential (that means secret). It will be stored on the University's computer and my notes will be destroyed. I will change everyone's names including the school's name. If we take any photos that include information about the school, this information will be blurred out.

Legal basis for research for studies

The University has a special procedure to make sure everyone is safe. I have had my study checked and the University has said it is ok to go ahead.

Contact:

If you want to ask any questions about what we are doing you can either ask me when I visit or ask the teacher to send me an email.

CONSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

Title: What is 'reading' in primary school?

Declaration of Consent

- I have been told about the research project described above and I understand what will happen.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO

- I know that I can say that I don't want to take part in the project and I don't have to explain why.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO

- I know that it is ok to decide not to take part up to three weeks after the project has finished (19/7/2019) when the recordings and notes have been stored on the University computer with different names.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO

- I know that all of our names and the school's name will be changed and that any photos that might identify us or the school will be blurred out.

  PLEASE CIRCLE - YES NO

- Name:
- Signed:
- School:
- Date:

Appendix H

Extension approval

ER6579919; What is 'reading' in primary school?; Doxey, Cara - Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; (All other research with human participants)

Approved with Advisory Comments ··· Admin Info

Introduction | P1 - General Information * | P2 - Project Outline * | P12 - Post Approval Amendments

Amendments - Guidance

Amendments are changes made to a research project after ethical approval has been given.

Amendments should be submitted if significant changes are made to the design or implementation of the project, but which are not expected to affec risks of the project.

Further guidance about what constitutes an amendment and changes that will require a new ethics application to be submitted can be accessed by c on this link /converis/web/converis/uploads/Amendments%20-%20Guidance.docx.

Amendment 1

Title of Amendment 1

Please provide a title for the amendment (e.g Extension to Project End Date)

Extension

9/1024

Details of Amendment 1

The children raised points that i feel would be fair to discuss with the teacher before writing up. An extension would provide the opportunity to return to school and conduct a semi structured interview to give the teacher the chance to comment on what the children have said. The interview is covered in the original ethics application.

337/3950

Date of Amendment 1

19/09/2019