# CHILDREN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH READING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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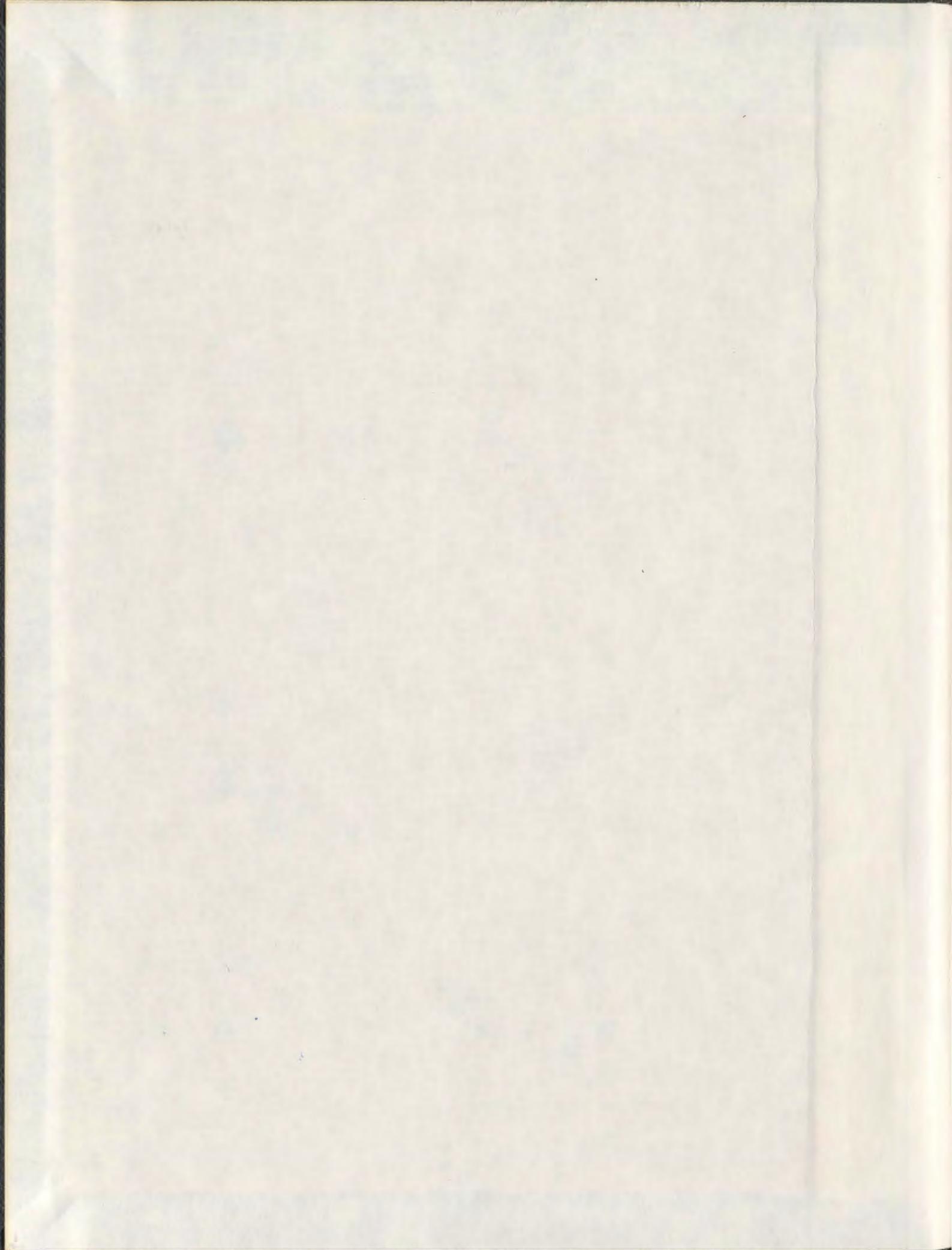
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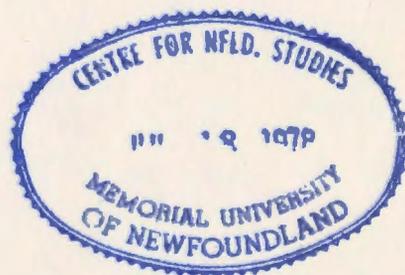
Children's Lived Experiences with Reading:
A Phenomenological Study

by

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A DISSERTATION
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"As with the child at play who creates meaning and self at the same time, so we who try to understand human experience also contribute to its transformation" (Barritt, 1986, p. 21).

"What we really want to do is be able to experience the world the way a child does" (van Manen, 2002, p. 84).

ABSTRACT

This study used a phenomenological research method to examine the question, "What are children's lived experiences with reading?" This question was explored through the perceptions of eight Grade Three children attending a rural school in Newfoundland and Labrador, where traditional print reading is being challenged by children's increasing engagements with new forms of texts and new literacies that include, but are not limited to, visual, informational, cultural, media, and digital texts. The purpose of this study was to glean an understanding of children's lived experiences with reading, through their articulations of their perceptions of these experiences within the context of the provincial reading curriculum and policies. Individual interviews, focus group discussions, and observation were used to gain access to children's experiences and to delineate themes emerging from their representations of their reading experiences. A view of the reading world of children that emerged from their perceptions contributes to a broader understanding of how children are experiencing reading and provides insight to facilitate future developments in reading policy and pedagogy. The findings extend our understanding of how children are experiencing reading and call on educators to be sensitive to the pedagogical significance of engaging children's insights in matters that involve them. Despite a curriculum that advocates for reading engagement, this study, through the lens of children's perceptions, presents children's lived reading experiences as passionless and disengaging.

DEDICATION

To my parents,

Harris Coles and Marcia (Hodge) Coles,

whose way of being in this world

continues to inspire me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This dissertation is a report of a phenomenological study which explored how children experience reading, both in and out of school, with a range of texts. The study was based primarily upon the perceptions of a selected group of eight Grade Three children whose insights, into their reading experiences, were articulated through observation, individual interviews, and focus group discussions. The study took place in eastern Canada in a rural part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), where traditional print reading is being challenged by children's increasing engagements with new forms of texts and new literacies that include, but are not limited to, visual, informational, cultural, and media and digital texts.

This first chapter introduces and contextualizes both the study and the phenomenon being explored. It presents the background and rationale for the study. As well, it describes the researcher's context, the research question being explored, the research participants, the research setting, and the significance of the study. It also provides an overview of the study.

Background and Rationale

For many years while educators, psychologists, sociologists, linguists, researchers, policymakers, and others have waged debates and constructed theories about literacy conceptions, literacy policy, and literacy pedagogy, children's voices have been absent. Over the past half century, understanding reading - a key component of literacy - and finding the best model for teaching and learning reading in printed alphabetic texts, have

been at the centre of the debates and work of researchers such as: Chall (1967, 2000); Smith (1976, 1978); Goodman (1986); Blair and Rupley (1983); Teale and Sulzby (1986); Adams (1990); Clay (1991); Rosenblatt (1991); Atwell (1998); Ehri (2000); and, Samuels (2002). They have debated and challenged top-down, bottom-up, and interactive instructional models of reading, phonics-based approaches (Chall, 1967; Moustafa & Maldonado-Colon, 1999; Ehri, 2000) and whole language (Goodman, 1986).

Through all of these debates and perspectives on reading, the voices and insights of children have been left untapped. My review of the research literature indicates that, while a lot of research has focused on the phonics and whole language debates (Chall, 1967, 2000; Adams, 1990; Goodman, 1986, and Smith, 1976), observing (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Clay, 1991) and surveying children as readers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Bond & Dykstra, 1967), researchers have not tended to go to children to find out from them how they are experiencing reading. The voices and perspectives of adults have been front and centre in discussions and debates about children and reading while children's voices and perspectives from their lifeworlds have been consistently absent from the research.

Over the past couple of decades, regional policy and pedagogical developments in reading have continued the trend of excluding children from the development process. For example, during the 1990s in Canada, policies and curriculum frameworks, as well as provincial and territorial strategic literacy plans, were developed based on the input and perspectives of a wide range of people, with the exception of children. The governing agencies of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) and the Western

Canadian Protocol (WCP), developed, respectively, the *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* (1996) and *The Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (1998), without the benefit of input from children. Based on these developments, resources have been authorized for primary children, without ever going to them to learn from their perspectives.

During this same period, *Our children Our Future* (1992), Newfoundland and Labrador's second Royal Commission on education was released. It drew heavily on "the extensive resources of the Department of Education to supply data about all aspects of the [education] system"(p. 8). The Commission visited 51 schools around the province. "These visits provided opportunities to discuss the work of the schools with principals and teachers"(p. 7). To stimulate discussion on issues, the Commission held 36 public hearings between 1990 and 1991. Presentations came from all parts of the province and beyond.

> A total of 1,041 written and oral presentations, representing 3,677 individuals and 384 groups and organizations was received. The submissions came from 173 communities from all geographic areas of the province, and represented a broad spectrum of society, including parents, teachers, school boards, business and industry, churches, education and health associations, and community groups. In addition to the briefs, 128 petitions containing 8,787 names were received (p. 13). Constructions of childhood positioning children as subjects (Canella, 1998)

prevailed and kept them out of the development process. Major reform was being planned for them without involving them in the process.

During the past twenty years or so, policy developments on the world scene tended to focus on outcomes and accountability and children were left out of the development process. The United Nations'(UN) global policies for improving literacy such as the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) did not include input from children directly. Other language arts initiatives, including the *National Council for Teachers of English Language Arts Standards* (NCTE) in the United States (US), 1996; the *United Kingdom* (UK) *National Literacy Strategy*, 1996; the *English in the New Zealand* (NZ) *Curriculum*, 1994; and, *Australian National Literacy and Numeracy Plan*, 1998, did not go directly to children for their input to inform these policy developments.

The issue of the absence of children's perspectives in literacy developments came full circle as, in the current decade, school book publishers used the jurisdictional curriculum frameworks to inform the process of developing resources for reading. As recently as 2004-06, based on my personal experience in discussions and working with publishing companies such as Thomson Nelson and Scholastic Canada, the development process for their new literacy series was not informed by children's insights. As publishers consulted with curriculum developers and educators across the country in discussions for the new literacy series, children's voices were not engaged in the development process.

The absence of children's voices has not gone unnoticed, however. Critical theorist, Cannella (1998), in her discussion on childhood as distinct, separate, and

psychological, claimed that, children's voices "have remained silent under the weight of our psychological, educational, and policy constructions of and for them" (p. 173). She further pointed out that the knowledge constructed by adults has been used to legitimate systems of control over children as they continue to be valued for who they will become.

Psychologists, Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) and early literacy researchers, Nutbrown and Hannon (2003), have pointed to the lack of inclusion of children in decisions relating to literacy. Nutbrown and Hannon, reporting on their study of the perspectives of five-year-olds on family literacy, went so far as to suggest that the involvement of children as research participants should be afforded them as a matter of right so that their views can be taken into consideration in the development of policy and the evolution of pedagogical practices that are designed to involve them. Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000), in discussing the sociological dimensions of researching children's perspectives, called for reconstructions of childhood where children are participants and citizens. They noted that shifting from constructions of childhood that view children as possessions and as subjects to constructions that view them as participants and citizens, requires children's insights about how they are experiencing matters that involve them and this includes reading.

The ongoing concerns about reading interest, engagement, and achievement, the absence of children's perceptions and insights in reading research and reading policy development, as well as children's increasing engagements with multi-modal texts, compel me to seek to examine the reading experiences of children by going directly to

them for their perspectives. For this phenomenological study, therefore, children's perceptions guide the exploration of their experiences with reading.

The Phenomenon

Primary children are experiencing reading a range of texts such as books, newspapers, computer screens, electronic games, in different formats, including, traditional print-based texts, multi-modal texts, and digital texts. However, as parents, educators, researchers, governments, and others continue their quest for the elusive solution to understanding reading and children, to improving reading achievement, to promoting a culture of reading, children's potential for input into reading developments has been left untapped.

Over the past two decades, the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador, like many other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, has released policies which have laid out strategic plans for understanding and improving the state of reading for young children. Some of these have been released over the past decade or so, and include initiatives such as, *Special Matters: The Report of the Review of Special Education* (1996), with a special chapter dedicated to reading; the *Primary English Language Arts Curriculum Guide* (1999), with a special focus on reading as one of the strands; *Words to Live By: A Strategic Literacy Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (2000), with a focus on reading from birth to adult; and, *Primary Matters: A Provincial Strategy for Early Literacy* (1998), with an extensive focus on reading for ages three to eight.

While reading has been a topic of concern and debate for researchers, educators, and policymakers, those who are closest to reading, the children, have not been invited to give their input on their lived experiences with reading. Children, in their lifeworld, continue to be at the receiving end of decisions that are made about reading. van Manen (1997), alludes to a gap which is occurring between pedagogy and the world of children, claiming that modern educational theory and research tends toward abstraction, "thus losing touch with the lifeworld of living with children; and failing to see the general erosion of pedagogic meaning from the lifeworld" (p. 135). He refers to a trend in ethnographic research which has resulted in numerous studies of children's lives as texts, in various settings, which distance and estrange us from those lives rather than bring them closer into the field of vision of our interest, as pedagogues. A question for this dissertation is, *Can children's articulation of their experiences with reading, from within their lifeworlds, help increase awareness and understanding about reading, which can, in turn, be used to inform future developments in policy and pedagogy?* Can children's untapped perspectives become the solution to untying the "Gordian Knot" of reading?

Some researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Dyson, 2003; Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003; Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; Carrington, 2005) have acknowledged the absence of children's perspectives in research methodology in general, in education. Marshall and Rossman (2006), in their discussions on interviewing, acknowledge this absence in noting that there are calls for including children's perspectives in learning more about aspects of their worlds, especially in education where often those [the children] who are most affected by educational policy and decisions about programs, are

absent from inquiry. Dyson (2003) takes a similar stand and suggests that literacy research tends to look outward at children's lives from inside the world of official school practices where the focus is on "those experiences and resources that reflect back comfortable, tidy images of children on the literacy path..."(p. 5).

Other researchers have acknowledged that children's perspectives are different from adults and use this as the rationale for claiming that children's voices need to be heard on matters that affect them. Centuries ago, philosopher and theorist, Jean Jacques Rousseau noted that "childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling and nothing is more foolish than to try and substitute ours for theirs"(Rousseau,1883/1956, p. 39). A little more than two decades ago, developmental psychologist, Donaldson (1978), pointed to the reasoning potential of children's minds, claiming that educators underestimate the rational powers of children for thinking and reasoning.

Others, such as psychologists, Lewis and Lindsay (2000), recognize that accessing children's perspectives may require different methods of investigation. They claim that in order for researchers to advance their understanding of children's perspectives and the worlds in which they live, they will need to give consideration to, "ways in which innovatory methods of social investigation can be developed and used with children so as to gain access to children's perspectives" (p. xiv).

Researchers, Braunger and Lewis (2006), allude to the potential benefits for reading instruction based on children's perceptions. In their synthesis of research on reading, they suggest that there is a relationship between children's perspectives and insights, and reading instruction. They conclude that a better understanding of how

children view reading is essential to providing instruction and experience that meet the needs of children.

My contact with literacy scholars in Canada, the US, and the UK, and with children, have confirmed this phenomenon of the absence of children's voices from literacy research. It also points to the need for research on reading which includes children's voices and insights. Writing in an e-mail to me, literacy researcher, Carrington, wrote, "Your study sounds very interesting and timely. There's a real move towards voice and I think that children are always the absent voice in many discussions of literacy. It's [literacy] been something that is done to children rather than something in which they are perceived to have an active and strategic engagement" (V. Carrington, personal communication, June 10, 2006).

As an initial foray into my research, I had an informal conversation with a friend's son, a local Grade Three student. His descriptions of his reading experiences resonated with me. It caused me to reflect on the purpose of my research, my own experiences with reading, and my experiences with not being heard. His comments became part of my experience in gleaning the research question. The 'voice' of this boy, confirmed for me, that children have important things to say about reading, that their experiences need to be heard, and that I needed to take the time to listen to children's voices in order to explore their insights into their reading experiences.

You know, Linda, I don't like the kind of reading we do in school and we're not allowed to bring to school the things I like to read. I like reading about things I'm interested in because when you read about things you're interested in, reading is

easier because as soon as you open the book you know some of the words right

away. You know...like Harry Potter books. I like them but I wasn't allowed to

bring them into my classroom. I could read them on the playground or in my own

house but not in school. The teacher told us we couldn't. As soon as I started

reading Harry Potter, reading was easier and it was fun because I already knew

some of the characters in the book, and there were only certain words that I

couldn't read right away. You can read them and you can guess the words you

don't know because...you know ...most of them you already know.

This boy's statement lingered with me as I explored research topics and

methodology. It served as validation that children do indeed have important things to say

about how they experience reading. It also confirmed for me that going to the source, to

the lived experiences of children, was very timely for reading research. This boy's

insights, combined with my tacit and poignant knowledge, told me that there are sound

pedagogical, educational, legal, political, social, technological, commercial, and moral

reasons why children's voices and their perceptions need to be included in matters that

affect them and these, obviously, include reading. The idea of moving into the children's

world with research that would enable me to hear directly from them, about their lived

experiences, embodied a sense of hope and potential, for challenging theory about reading

and for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs, which may ultimately

position children as participants in matters that affect them.

Researcher's Context

My career in education has been a journey of joy, epiphanies, discovery, and ambivalence and much of it has been intertwined with children and reading. As a primary school teacher, I have experienced the joy associated with guiding and leading children to places they have never been before and the epiphanies of arriving; the wonderful sense of satisfaction associated with a child's discovery of reading; the ambivalence associated with being part of a bureaucracy where reading curriculum is developed in the absence of children's voices. I have also experienced the utter dismay at discovering that a child who knows how to read does not choose reading as an activity of choice.

My reading journey began as a child in a small community in Newfoundland and Labrador where reading was silence, aloneness, repetition, and jumping past the few words on the page to lose oneself in the Dick and Jane images that could be engaging in the absence of print and in the quiet of the imagination. It was solitary homework under the lamplight where the control of the teacher penetrated the silence and reading ceased after a specified page. Reading was competition for the position at the top of the row as we stood and read aloud. It was the uncomfortable confidence of being the top reader in a row and then the fear and embarrassment as a silence spot triggered a bumping to the bottom of the row. Reading was performance. There were reading times, reading sentences, reading spaces, reading tests, reading exercises, and rehearsing and counting sentences in anticipation of having to read one. Even traditional print-based materials were scarce and the joys that come from reading a text were savoured, sometimes causing

one to stop before the end of a book, because, when the journey through a book or newspaper was over, there might not be a lot of other books to journey through.

Reading wasn't something that children talked about. Children were silent witnesses to the texts. The Dick and Jane stories were of other worlds and cultures, separate from the world of my little fishing community. Mothers in our communities did not wear high-heel shoes. The ritualized experiences of reading were not of relationships and engagements with fiction or non-fiction but thrived on superficialities of taking turns reading, reading for homework, reading out loud, reading a sentence, reading to win, and reading to go to the next grade. Children were silenced and placed under surveillance to legitimate systems of control orchestrated by adults. Children's voices and perspectives about reading were absent. They understood the rules of reading and adhered to them.

My meanderings, excursions, and expressions through art over the years, has afforded me the privileged opportunities to attempt to grasp the essence of some experiences, through engaging, as sources of my work, the experiential lifeworld of human beings, in particular children. Recreating experiences through reflections has led me to: reading in rows, the special silence of the playground that a child experiences when she arrives late for school, the shiver down the spine as a note gets passed to another child in defiance and in an effort to communicate, and then to the engulfing discomfort at being watched as the lines being written on the blackboard commit her to never talking again in school or forever remembering to complete assigned homework.

In my search for meaning and the struggle to find my voice, art, as a way of representation, became very important to me. It enabled me to ascribe value and give

meaning to the primal childhood experiences temporarily suspended in the recess of my mind. Representing these experiences through art, not only helped me to formulate my sense of self and appreciation for my sense of place in the world, but it also served as ballast in my career as I maneuvered from being a teacher to a curriculum developer in a government bureaucracy. There, the disavowal of knowledge and experience disembodied the pedagogical spirit and separated it from the world of children. Through three-dimensional renderings of images of rural Newfoundland and Labrador I could return to school experiences and children's spaces, and reflection on meaning that was just beyond the language.

I have been privileged, during my career in education, to have shared in the lives of many children and to have experienced reading from a number of perspectives. During the nineties, after being a primary teacher for many years, working as a provincial primary program development specialist within the bureaucracy of the provincial Department of Education, I found myself in a position of having to rationalize some very basic assumptions about reading and children. A government official admonished, "Linda, you don't need to teach children how to read, just surround them with books and they will learn to read anyway." Another bureaucrat questioned in disbelief, " Are you really saying that we need books for kindergarten classrooms?" A principal of a primary school rebuked a Grade Two teacher for requesting books for her classroom, arguing, "You can forget about buying books...as part of our strategic plan we are allocating our budget to technology for the next five years." Then sitting as a delegate at the APEF meetings to negotiate and develop common curriculum initiatives, the politics of reading became

clearer to me as children's voices were again left out of the curriculum development process for English language arts. A few years later as a member of a cross-Canada writing team for a book publishing company, the starting point for developing new reading materials for primary children was the regional curricula that had been developed earlier.

Constructions of children as possessions and subjects have prevailed throughout my career as a teacher, a curriculum developer, an Executive Director of Literacy, an artist, and a sessional university instructor. These constructions have been at the root of policy development where children have been viewed as possessions and investments and without voice. Situated within the education system, I have been witness to a trend of children's increasing engagements with the texts of toy manufacturers, video game producers, Disney Incorporated, and computer technologies. These and other big businesses have moved into children's spaces to engage them in particular 'reading' texts and modes of representations over and over again. Hence, I arrive at this point where I feel the need to hear what children have to say about their lived reading experiences.

While reading is foundational for children's reading success and achievement in all disciplines, pedagogical developments have been challenged by the absence of the voices and perceptions of children who are at the receiving end of these developments.

Research Question

Children are situated at the confluence of curriculum, and teaching and learning policies. Within their spaces there, at the bottom of top-down policy development, they are experiencing reading in particular ways. Because there is little research that goes

directly to children to explore their experiences with reading, a phenomenological study

dedicated to understanding children's lived experiences with reading best lends itself to

examining the research question, *"What are children's experiences with reading?"*

Phenomenological research is an important way of understanding the lives of those for

whom we bear pedagogic responsibility (Tesch, 1984).

My research question grows out of a strong interest in examining the reading

experiences of children, from their perspectives. Inherent in this compelling commitment

to hearing from children about their lived experiences with reading, is the hope of

revealing more fully the essence and meaning of their reading experiences, and to

illuminate through careful, comprehensive writing descriptions, vivid and accurate

renderings of those experiences. It does not seek to predict or determine causal

relationships.

In this postmodern world of partial knowledge, local narratives, situated truths,

and evolving identities (Lyotard, 1984), reading, for humans as meaning-seeking

creatures, has the potential for nourishing our souls. While reading is a fountain to quench

the human thirst and longing for meaning, it also has the potential for responding to our

need for information and knowledge, for fulfilling our desires for freedom and escape, for

satisfying our quest to journey and discover where we have never been before, and for

awakening within us that which keeps us human. Reading can carry forward the "grand

narratives"of society and break them apart. Metaphorically, reading can open up new

worlds to set us free and build walls to imprison us. Within the constructs of power and

politics lies reading, tangible and within reach for some and beyond the grasp of others. This study takes us there through the voices of the marginalized, the children.

The following are some of the underlying questions that are guiding this study as I sit and watch young readers: What are the essences of reading? What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for children's view(s) of reading? What are the universal structures that precipitate feelings about reading? In a digital age, what types of texts do children prefer to read? How are children's lifeworlds positioned within classrooms for reading? How are children's school reading positioned within their lifeworlds? How are children themselves positioned within their reading experiences? What makes reading difficult/easy? What are children's experiences with being read to and with independent reading? What do children like/dislike about traditional print-based texts? What do children like/dislike about the new literacies texts which engage the new technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Kellner, 2001; Barrell & Hammett, 2000)? Can children's voices add insights that can help inform reading policies and pedagogy? Can children's perceptions of their experiences help re-think literacy practices in light of new technologies? Can such inquiry help the researcher to return to the original vocation of educational researchers and theorists, of helping bring up and educate children in a pedagogically responsible manner (van Manen, 1997)? Can children's voices help researchers to step outside the current theories and practices of literacy education that are tied to alphabetic text (Hassett, 2006)?

Removed from the prescribed curriculum and provincial criterion-referenced tests (CRTs), can we appreciate and respect the voice of the child, the perspectives of this

"human text"? Are we willing or even able to "make room" for children's voices and insights in our pedagogical lives? Can this research journey offer hope of transforming children's outlook, their relations, their place and their life's course?

Significance of the Study

The experiences of a particular group of Grade Three children provide a lens through which the reading experiences of children can be viewed from their perspectives. In this era of accountability, teachers are often pressured to focus on learning outcomes, thus restricting their own opportunities for eliciting children's perceptions and making it more critical for research to do so.

This study, in positioning the child as participant within the research process, will add to the discussions and debates on literacy and reading. Children's perceptions of their reading experiences will help unravel some of the complexities that are inherent in reading as it is situated and experienced within the lifeworld of children today.

While the results of this phenomenological study are not meant to be generalizable, this type of inquiry can provide an informed starting point for future research on children's perceptions of how they experience reading. The results will add depth and breadth to the limited knowledge that exists around how children are experiencing reading and may provide professionals with keener insight into children's lifeworlds which can help inform reading policy and pedagogy. It also allows me the opportunity to focus my experiences in teaching, curriculum, and policy development on describing and illuminating the essence of how children experience reading through their

perceptions. It will contribute to, and build on, previous research which validates children's voices and insights.

For literacy educators, the reading experiences of these children can be cause for reflection and may help transform personal practice and cause them to take a different stance toward curricula issues, their students, and life inside the primary classroom.

The Research Participants

The study's participants were a selected class of Grade Three children from a rural school within the Eastern School District in Newfoundland and Labrador. This school was intentionally chosen for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to avoid situations, in the urban area, where I knew the teachers and/or principals well because I felt this could be disadvantageous and could undermine the study. Some of these people had preconceived notions that they could tell me up front what to expect from their students. As one teacher said, "I can tell you right away what the problem is with reading for children at our school and it has everything to do with the type of parents." Others saw this as an assessment opportunity where they could obtain more information about how the children were performing in reading. As a principal said, "Let me know what you find out about them [the children]." To avoid these kinds of problems, which could result in assumptions and biases that would undermine the purpose of the study, it was beneficial for me to situate my study in a school outside the urban area where I wouldn't know the principal or the teacher very well and I would be less well-known. Secondly, I was hoping for a broader range of student perspectives. I felt that I would be more likely to encounter a broader range in the rural area because the catchment area for this school included a number of

small communities along the coast. I felt that it was highly likely that some of the parents would be employed in the urban area close by, whereas others would be either working in the small community, in the fishing industry, unemployed, or working outside the province. This would undoubtedly affect the dynamics of the Grade Three class both in terms of the range of learners and the differences in socio-economic status (SES) of the children. Some of these children would have accessed some of the services in the city, such as libraries, bookstores, toy stores, and shopping malls, while other children's reading experiences and texts would have been contained within the context of the home, the school, and the local community.

The Grade Three class in this school had 32 children. They all participated in the first and second phase of the study, the observation phase. The selection of a subgroup of the eight children (four boys and four girls) who were to be interviewed, was based on themes that arose during the whole class activities in Phases One and Two of the data collection process. The children selected were those who appeared to be articulate and clearly interested in sharing their perceptions and insights about their reading experiences as well as being willing to participate in the interview and focus group sessions. It was anticipated that at this point in the study, children would have developed a rapport with the researcher, and the interview process would be embraced by children as an opportunity to share their perceptions of their reading experiences. This is in keeping with van Manen's (1997) approach where he claims that, "It has been noticed by those conducting hermeneutic interviews that the... participants of the study often invest more

than a passing interest in the research project in which they have willingly involved themselves" (p. 98).

A letter (see Appendix A), requesting permission (as per school district policy) to conduct the study in this particular school, was forwarded to the School District Office. After permission was obtained from the School District Office, a Letter of Introduction (see Appendix B) was forwarded to the principal. A Parent Information Letter and Consent Form (see Appendix C), for the four phases of the study, were sent to the parents/guardians of each child in the Grade Three class.

The Eastern School District, while geographically diverse, envelopes a small community atmosphere where educators within the communities tend to know each other. To ensure confidentiality for the participants, neither the school, nor the child will be named in this dissertation or any report that may result from this study.

Research Setting

Important to this research, is a thick description of the research setting and the reading experiences of children. The research site was a classroom in a rural school in the Eastern School District of Newfoundland and Labrador. Conducting the study in a school where I did not know the teachers very well, provided better support for the purpose of the study. Because of the catchment area the school draws from - rural communities along the coast- some of the children were affected by out-migration to other provinces and, in some cases, to urban areas, as a result of a downturn in the fishery. Some families experienced having one parent working out of the province. Other parents were either working in the city, their own communities, or unemployed. As well, being just a half-

hour drive from an urban area, meant that the children had access to libraries, bookstores, sports facilities, toy stores, stadiums, and theatres, and some children had a range of experiences in this regard. Other children relied more on the resources that their own communities had to offer.

This school had a large playground with equipment. It also had a garden area that was being worked on. This project was a great source of pride for the children as well as the teachers and principal. The school had a gymnasium with a stage. It was used for physical education classes, guest speakers, school assemblies, concerts, and other whole school activities. There were some posters on the walls, one of which contained the lyrics to a school song. Every time the whole school's population came to the gymnasium for some special events they would sing the song together. The nature of the song was related to encouraging good behaviours. The school had a library with books and a small number of computers. Generally, teachers took their classes to the library about once every seven-day cycle. The school's lunchroom was used as an eating area for children who stayed for lunch. During lunch periods, children would take turns being servers in the lunchroom. Sometimes the lunchroom was used to bring a few grades together for music. The school's music room was used for music classes. The staffroom was the place where teachers gathered for breaks, to work, and to meet. During the course of my stay at the school, I conducted interviews in all of these rooms, including the classrooms.

The Grade Three classroom, where the study was based, had individual desks for each child. The teacher's desk was located next to the windowed side of the room. The walls had various charts. Some of the charts included rubrics, the school song, and a

class calendar. One wall carried the children's most recent art projects. Another wall was covered with bookshelves containing the provincially authorized books, workbooks, exercise books, spelling books, anthologies, mathematics books. The bookshelves were covered so the books on the shelves were hidden from view. As the books were needed, the covering would be lifted and the particular books taken to the desks at the beginning of each class session and returned at the end of the session. The classroom had a box of books at the back of the room and they were used during silent reading periods. Mathematics manipulatives such as place value items, blocks, and others items were stored in trays in the classroom. Sometimes children brought electronic games, cell phones, cabbage patch kids, wrestling magazines, webkinz, Pokemons, or other personal things to school. These were used during morning recess and lunch breaks.

A consistent component in the daily routines was the morning prayers. This signaled the beginning of a new day in school. The teacher would say a prayer and then each individual child would be invited to say their prayer. Some children did opt not to say a prayer but the majority of the children did say a prayer. The prayers ranged from praying for family, praying for a hockey stick, praying for the judgement day for wrestlers, to praying for the boys and the girls in the class.

Creswell (1998) emphasizes the importance of selecting a good place for the interview and suggests that the researcher find, if possible, a quiet space free from distractions. At times, this proved to be a challenge because the school had very limited space that was not already in use. Sometimes I used the stage in the gym, sometimes a classroom that was freed up when children went to the music room or the gym, and

sometimes the music or lunch room, when they were not in use. I made every effort to be discrete about the audiotaping and to ensure that the setting lended itself to this type of activity without causing any discomfort to the participant or interrupting the activities of the school. The teachers were very accommodating with this particular component of the data collection process.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and understand the essence of children's reading experiences by examining the research question, *"What are children's experiences with reading?"* Students' articulations of their experiences are described and interpreted with the intention of developing an understanding of the essence of children's reading experiences.

Chapter One of the dissertation provides an introduction to the topic, the researcher, the research question being explored, the participants, and the research setting. It presents a background and rationale for the study and outlines the significance of the study and the phenomenon to be explored. The rationale, for the site location and the selection of the sample, are provided. As well, my context, relative to this phenomenon, is introduced. A brief overview of the study is also provided in this chapter.

Chapter Two provides an exploration of the research literature as it relates to reading, engagement, and children's perceptions. The evolving theoretical perspectives and models of reading instruction and learning are explored. The literature on reading and different types of texts is reviewed with a particular focus on children's core engagements and experiences with reading a range of texts including, but not limited to, visual, digital,

cultural, informational, and media texts. An overview is presented of some historical landmarks that influenced research, policy, and pedagogy in English language arts.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used for the study and the role of the researcher within this context. It contextualizes the research participants within the study and provides a rationale for using a phenomenological approach to explore children's perceptions of their reading experiences. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, participant selection, storage of data, and anonymity are discussed. The four-phase data collection and data analysis procedures and hermeneutic interpretation (van Manen, 1997; Moustakas, 1994) are presented. Also included, in this chapter, are discussions on phenomenology, validity, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four presents the descriptions and explorations of children's reading experiences gathered from the observations and interviews. Their experiences are presented as themes which emerge through the information gathering process. Children's reading experiences are presented in such a way as to be true to their voices and the perceptions of their experiences. Some descriptions of non-verbal gestures and behaviours are described in order to illuminate the children's descriptions.

Chapter Five brings closure to the research journey. Within the context of the literature review, the themes revealed in Chapter Four and the methodology outlined in Chapter Three, the researcher moves with the reader into a reflection on the journey.

Chapter Six provides a summary of the journey with children. It also presents the researcher's introspection and concludes with implications of this study for the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Exploring the Literature

Introduction

This chapter foregrounds aspects of the research literature that have addressed the areas of children's perceptions, theoretical conceptions of reading, and reading engagement. It also provides an overview of historical landmarks in English language arts. It serves as a prelude for the journey to begin into the phenomenon of Grade Three children's experiences with reading and leads to an opportunity for the present study to contribute to and build on the profusion of knowledge and research that already exists.

Reading research has been extensive for the past half century and the number and range of research topics have expanded considerably. The thousands of studies contained within the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), the PsycINFO, the Linguistics databases, and the Theses Canada portal, is a clear indication of, the ongoing quest to understand reading and reading instruction, the prominence of this subject area in education and research, and the marked absence of children's voices in this quest. After searching these databases I made a decision to focus my review on research conducted over the last two decades.

Despite the overwhelming amount of research that has been carried out, much of it has focused on debates connected to aspects of bottom-up (i.e., where the process of translating print to meaning begins with print) and top-down (i.e., where the process of translating print to meaning begins with the reader's prior knowledge) models for reading (Vacca et al, 2009) with a reliance on observation and quantitative studies. Techniques of

observation have proliferated but far less attention has been given to "listening to children and soliciting their views" (Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003, p.118). The studies that have been done have generally resulted in certain theories about reading gaining prevalence over others and their findings being used to inform reading pedagogy, often resulting in the hegemony of certain classroom practices over others.

The ongoing debates and concern about reading, the absence of children's voices regarding their reading experiences, as well as the place of reading within the context of new literacies and multiliteracies, call for taking the quest somewhere else. This study builds on previous research on reading and children's perceptions to gain a deeper understanding of how children perceive their reading experiences. This literature review identifies the highlights of what is already known about children's perceptions and reading research. It provides an overview of theoretical conceptions of reading, and historical landmarks in English, and in doing so, leads the way for this journey into unexplored territory.

Children's Perceptions

Positioned at the receiving end of policy, curriculum, and accountability developments, children have remained voiceless in a top-down process where their perceptions and insights about aspects of reading have been largely absent. As recent as a decade ago, Mayall (1996), writing about curriculum developments in England, noted that it, "...explicitly denies children's knowledge and experience as a determinant of the agenda" (p. 80). Children's voices are also absent in outcomes-oriented trends on the world scene in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and England,

where literacy policy has used top-down curriculum development processes, inadvertently denying children the opportunity to participate with their knowledge and perspectives.

Educational research has followed a similar pattern. Briggs and Nichols (2001) in a study that focused on children's views of schools, teachers, the curriculum, punishment, and social justice noted that most studies of children have had one feature in common; children have had very little voice in the research. In the past, adults have been more interested in observing children and deciding what is best for them, rather than attempting to find out children's own subjective viewpoints.

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000), as well as researchers in the social study of childhood (Christensen & James, 2000), and others, claim that children remain a marginalized culture, with their views largely ignored, because of the stigmatisation of incompetence and innocence. In a similar vein, Marshall and Rossman (2006), suggest that "...especially in education...all too often those most affected by educational policy and programmatic decisions, the students, are absent from inquiry"(p. 106).

In keeping with Lloyd-Smith and Tarr's (2000), Christensen and James' (2000), and Marshall and Rossman's (2006) notion of children's absence from inquiry in educational policy and program decisions, Sinclair (2000) suggests that despite the rhetoric on raising standards in education, the key stakeholders in the system, the children, have diminished opportunities to play their part in defining or contributing to what those standards are. This is especially true in the area of reading research where debates have been waged and programs and resources adopted without any direct input from children.

Even where people claim to be working on children's behalf, there seems to have been little attempt to understand their ways of seeing the world. For example, in Canada, much of the information in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) collected by Statistics Canada, from 1994-2001, during the four cycles of the survey, was gathered from parents on behalf of their children by means of a household interview or from the person who was "most knowledgeable" (PMK) about the child. For example, information was collected from the child's teacher and principal through questionnaires. Only children who were aged 10 or older were given the opportunity to provide input to the survey through a separate questionnaire in the home.

Calling for a shift in thinking in the way society positions children, Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) argue that from a social and moral perspective, shifting from constructions of childhood that view children as possessions and as subjects to constructions of childhood that view them as participants and citizens, requires children's voices, their insights, and their perspectives.

Claiming that children are being influenced by electronic communication, television, other media, the world of fashion and screen idols, Hendrick (2000) concludes that children are becoming more demanding of their parents and wanting to have more say in matters that affect them. Roberts (2000), believes that this signals a message to society, in general, that children should be given a voice.

Is there something very important and relevant missing when the perspectives of children are not included in decisions about reading? Can children's voices add insights that can help inform reading policies and practices and ultimately make reading a more

positive, engaging, and successful experience for children? Can children's perceptions of their experiences help to re-think literacy practices in light of new technologies? Can children's voices help researchers to step outside the current theories and practices of literacy education that are tied directly to alphabetic text?

According to Kist (2005), the new technologies and their interactivity and nonlinearity have heightened the need to situate any literacy study within the contexts of the readers and writers being studied. In a similar vein, Christensen and James (2000) suggest that by listening to and hearing what children have to say and by being attentive to the ways in which they communicate with us, researchers will find the means by which to work *with* children rather than conducting research *about* children.

Consistent with this notion, Burgess (2000) calls for a different style of research to advance our understanding of children's perspectives and the worlds in which they live, suggesting that, "...researchers need to give some thought to ways in which innovatory methods of social investigation can be developed and used with children so as to gain access to children's perspectives of the worlds in which they live and work" (p. xiv).

The lack of research that places children at the centre of the research process, as participants rather than as subjects, calls for a new paradigm where children are given a voice and their perspectives given value. A relatively new orientation, promoted through the sociology of childhood, concerns the ascertaining of children's own perspectives on their learning, understanding, relationships and experiences (Christensen & James, 2000). The underlying philosophy is that children's relationships with their social worlds is

worthy of study and children need to be invited to give voice to their lived experiences. While some research has focused on children's perceptions, over the past decade or so, children's views and voices on reading have been largely under represented in educational research.

There are those who acknowledge that the views, insights, and perceptions of all groups should be heard and valued in research (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Sinclair (2000); Dyson, 2003; Carrington, 2005; Marsh, 2005) and are beginning to realize the potential of children's perspectives for educational research. Sinclair (2000) suggests that it is timely for policy and practice to embody the spirit and intent of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and ensure that children are given a more participatory role, a voice at all levels of decision making, including in the development and implementation of research. Article 12 of the Convention, commits to "the child's right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child" (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000, p. 26). Sinclair (2000) goes on to say that the success of policies and practice is directly related to the sense of ownership of those who are most affected by them and policy and practice relating to children's reading need to reflect this.

The UK has supported the intent of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in establishing the Education Act (1993) and the Code of Practice (1994) which accepts as an ethical imperative that children have a right to be heard (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000). Further to this, in 2003, Margaret Hodge, the first Children's Minister in the UK, published the "Every Child Matters " agenda which includes a commitment to empowering children to have their voices heard. The overall vision for this agenda is of a

society where children have their views actively sought, listened to and acted upon and where they are at the centre of policy and practice that affect them.

Legislating that children's voices be heard in the UK has stimulated interest in researching children's perceptions on various issues that involve them. Some researchers have already taken up the challenge of engaging children's voices. Particularly in this decade, Christensen and James (2000) note a paradigm shift where there has been an increase in participatory research *with* children rather than observation *of* them. A number of researchers have acknowledged children as social beings rather than as members of a voiceless group (Pahl, 2005; Marsh, 2005; Carrington, 2005; Dyson, 2003, 2004; Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Briggs & Nichols, 2001) and have invited children's perceptions for particular investigations. For example, recent research has explored children's perceptions on issues such as family literacy (Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003), literacy teaching (Wray & Medwell, 2005), the experience of childhood (Briggs & Nichols, 2001), and what children think about reading (Medwell, 1991).

Some researchers have validated children's perspectives in educational research through their participation in studies. Nutbrown and Hannon's (2003) conclusions indicate that the impact of a family literacy programme is discernible through children's perspectives. Wray and Medwell (2005) concluded that the insights of children cannot be gained unless teachers and researchers start taking account of the views about literacy held by them, suggesting that, "Student perceptions do matter and we need to take much more seriously the business of finding out what they are" (p. 10). As well, Medwell (1991) found that children's perspectives were valid and poor readers appeared to have a

narrow concept of reading and a limited range of strategies for approaching it, whereas good readers tended to have a more balanced view of reading and were more meaning-focused. Supporting the validation of children's direct participation in research through the sharing of their insights and perspectives, Briggs and Nichols (2001) claimed that they were "constantly amazed by the richness and variety of children's responses and the way in which they connect fragmented knowledge and experiences to explain what they see and believe" (p.16).

Reinisch (2006), in her doctoral work on children's perceptions of their learning environment, uncovered many interesting and creative ideas from first grade children. Her study illustrated that children have much to contribute. They provided insight into their notions of table arrangements; being with people; color, design, texture; additions to the classroom; and books and paper. Reinisch further discovered that these Grade One children wanted to be listened to and wanted to participate in the process of planning their classroom environment.

While a lot of progress has been made, in particular in the current decade, on seeking input directly from children, the initial question which motivated this study, still remains unanswered - *What are children's perceptions of their reading experiences?* Primary children have not been invited to give their perceptions of how they experience reading. This study builds on the research on children's perspectives by going directly to children to listen to what they have to say, specifically about how they experience reading and to learn through their perceptions and descriptions about their reading experiences.

Only they who are living these reading experiences are in a position to be able to tell us about them.

Conceptions of Reading

Reading has been a subject of controversy throughout much of the twentieth century. Today it emerges as something different depending on the context. To the parent of a preschooler in western society, it is about reading books to your child; to the teacher in a primary classroom, reading is a set of outcomes, interventions, and CRTs; to a government bureaucrat, reading constitutes essential skills to be acquired for future success and employment; to book publishers it stimulates a lucrative market; to someone working at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), reading is about international assessments of reading literacy; to children in rural and aboriginal communities it is the disavowal of the local context; for the New London Group (2000) it is an essential component of multiliteracies; for young people and adults who can not read, it is a source of shame and alienation, and for many children in New Orleans, reading is about something beyond their grasp.

Debates about reading, learning to read and teaching reading– in particular, the clash between advocates for phonics and whole language– have prevailed over the last half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Going back to the days of Flesch (1955) and Chall (1967), concern about how best to teach reading was about which instructional approaches bring about success for all children. Fifty years later the debates continue. As recently as 1996, Goodman noted that the debate about the right and most effective approach continues unabated. Over the years, debates about reading

perspectives and approaches have been fueled by various theoretical perspectives and the paths that research has taken.

Perspectives on reading have ranged from cognitive development insights (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978) to language and sociocultural perspectives (Brice Heath, 1983), to sociocognitive perspectives (Gee, 2004), and to theoretical models of reading (Samuels, 2004; Rumelhart, 2004, Rosenblatt, 2004, Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). In the second half of the twentieth century, there has been an emergence of a view of language acquisition as a natural process which inevitably reverberated in reading research in the form of psycholinguistics (Smith, 1978; Goodman, 1973). During that period, much of the reading research focused on the individual mind and the roles of cognition and language in reading acquisition (Alexander & Fox, 2004). It was not until the "era of engaged learning, 1996 onward " (Alexander & Fox, 2004) that Dewey's (1910, 1991) earlier notions of progressive education and experiential learning and interest took hold again and became evident in conceptions of engagement where the reader is conceptualized as a motivated knowledge and meaning seeker. It is worthy of note that even in the postmodern world of today, a century after Dewey's major works, his theory still resonates with educators and researchers who share the conviction that democracy means active participation by all in social, political and economic decisions that will affect their lives. Reading is one of these.

Boyer (1995), like Canning (2000), notes the significance of reading for schools in suggesting that, "learning to read is without question the top priority in elementary education" (p. 69). Decades earlier, referring to the complexities and challenges of

reading, as well as its significance for children, Rousseau (1883/1956) noted that, "Reading is the greatest plague of childhood"(p. 51).

A myriad of theories and theorists, from cognitive to sociological, have emerged over the past 50 years. Theorists, including such noteworthies as: Vygotsky (1978), with his emphasis on acquiring mental functions through social relationships; Piaget (1973), with his theory of cognitive development; and Cambourne (1988), with his conditions for literacy learning, have stimulated research in reading. Chall (1967), with her stage theory for reading development; Goodman (1986), and his support for whole language and miscue analysis; Smith (1978), with the psycholinguistic approach to reading; and Clay (1991), with her theory of construction of inner control, have all advocated for instructional approaches for the teaching of reading, sometimes resulting in the hegemony of particular approaches over others. Turbill (2002) labels these hegemonies as ages of reading: the age of reading as decoding; the age of reading as meaning- making; the age of reading-writing connections; the age of reading for social purpose; and the age of multiliteracies. She advocates for a broadening of the view of reading, arguing that the digital world is here and it is a highly literacy dependent world which requires highly refined skills in reading beyond the traditional print-based texts.

The sociocultural theories (Street, 2005; Gee,2004; Pahl, & Rowsell,2005; Hull & Shultz, 2002) came during a period of rapid change. The early 1990s marked the beginning of the "postmodern" period and an age of contradiction. While there was a strong sense of human rights and equality for all, there was a focus on individual achievement in literacy so that one could become an employable citizen. Literacy was

becoming a political tool based in economic concerns. Politics and politicians began to take control of the literacy agenda. A number of countries, including Canada, issued rhetorical statements decreeing that all children would learn to read and write by the end of the primary grades. Adding a global dimension for literacy development, the UN, in 2003, launched the Literacy Decade (UNESCO, 2002). The quest for a new definition of literacy is one of the goals of the Literacy Decade's international plan of action.

Being part of the reading as decoding and reading as meaning debates, some researchers espoused literature-based approaches (Atwell,1998; Routman,1991) and whole language (Goodman,1986) and decried basal reader approaches, while others have been advocates for stage theory models (Chall, 2000) and phonics and word based approaches (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 2000) to reading instruction. Other researchers, such as Clay (1991); Samuels (2002); and Smith (1978), have theorized about the inner control that children have of their learning and what children do as they read linear conventions of an alphabetic writing system. Others such as Rosenblatt (1978) have drawn conclusions about motivation as it relates to aesthetic and efferent reading stances. Still others, in the world of the postmodern, have espoused reading and literacy for social purposes (Elkind, 1995), moving in the direction of literacy for a just and democratic society. Friere resisted a school-based definition of literacy that is associated with the world view, values, and aspirations of the middle class in his claim that, "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35).

Literacy theorists are calling for redefining literacy in order to encompass the kinds of representation, communication and production that are increasingly supplementing or replacing traditional modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Curriculum documents, such as Newfoundland and Labrador's *Primary English Language Arts Curriculum Guide* (1999), have included an expanded notion of literacy which incorporates a redefinition of text to describe any language event, whether oral, written, or visual. A conversation, a poem, a novel, a poster, a music video, and a multimedia production are all texts. According to Barrell (2000), students are now expected to read not only books, but also the world and to evaluate and respond to an ever expanding variety of texts. This shifts the etymological definition of literacy into the broader realm of all receptive and expressive modes of language.

Literacy scholar, Kelly (1997), calls for a further broadening of literacy and writes of a broadly conceived literacy education of language, representation, culture, and meaning. She reasons that the challenges of a postmodern culture require a different notion of literacy than the dominant ones that circulate within education. She argues that "literacy education needs to be reconceptualized within the postmodern as part of an educational project inspired by the diverse and divergent, but best, inclinations of poststructural theories, critical literacies, cultural studies, and radical pedagogies" (p. 2).

Where reading in the past has placed an emphasis on print and a reliance on the book as the dominant text type, in the world of the postmodern, notions of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and new literacies (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) have expanded the concept of literacy to include multiple text forms. These are

characterised by a range of written, spoken, visual, multimodal and digital texts conceptualized within: print literacy, visual literacy, in-school and out-of-school literacies, new literacies, critical literacies, cultural literacies, technological literacies, and others. Many children, with their visual, computer, electronic, and other texts, are sources of experience and insight and they have already developed forms of communication when they arrive at school (Willinsky,1990).

Today, the terms reading and literacy are often viewed as one and the same. For example, in Braunger and Lewis's (2006) most recent synthesis of research in reading, they acknowledge at the outset that they use reading and literacy interchangeably. They suggest that an important lesson of recent research in reading has been that "all forms of language and literacy develop supportively and interactively" (pp. 1-2). They go on to say that reading is a specialized form of language and an essential tool for critical and creative thinking, and adhere to a model of reading that is developmental, purposeful, interactive, and socially constructed where skills and strategies are best learned in the context of genuine engagements with texts. They take issue with the narrowing of the research focus for literacy funding over the past few years and the precipitation of simplistic models of what works in the teaching of reading. They contend that this kind of focus has led to problems with research in reading where the components of reading that can be controlled have been studied in experimental settings, resulting in a focus on instruction of discrete skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics).

Despite this, however, because reading is a critical component of literacy development and a key contributor to success in education at the primary level as well as

to overall success in school and the eventual "participation in the workplace, the community, and the body politic," (Braunger & Lewis, 2006, p. 2), it has held a place of importance within educational research.

Many of the studies on reading have been more positivist and quantitative in terms of methodology. Some examples of these are: Bond and Dykstra's (1967) *First Grade Studies*; Chall's (1967) *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson's (1985) *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*; Adams' (1990) *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*; Snow, Burns, and Griffin's (1998) *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*; Statistics Canada's Department of Human Resources (1994-2001) *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*; and, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's (2000) *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*. There appears to be few, if any, studies that seek to explore children's experiences with reading from their point of view. This, therefore, presents the opportunity for the application of a more descriptive methodology for exploring children's perceptions of their experiences with reading. A phenomenological methodology was therefore decided upon for this study.

This study attempts to move into a gap that exists in the abundance of research on reading, and find out, through children's articulation of their perceptions of their lived experiences with reading, about how they are experiencing reading within their lifeworld.

Reading Engagement

It is well understood by educators that overall success in education depends on children's reading capabilities. The challenges around how to teach reading and what accounts for reading success have been at the centre of debates and research for many years. As has been earlier established, there has been an ongoing quest for solutions to some of the reading challenges related to reading success. Much of the research has been aimed at understanding the nature of reading, how to motivate children to read, the best methods for teaching children to read, and how to foster reading interest and engagements (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). The provincial *Primary English Language Arts Curriculum* (1999), singles out engagement as a significant challenge to children's learning in English language arts. It makes a bold statement about the challenge of engaging all learners.

> One of the greatest challenges to teachers is engaging students who feel alienated from learning in English language arts and from learning in general – students who lack confidence in themselves as learners, who have potential that has not been realized. Among them are students who seem unable to concentrate, who lack everyday motivation for academic tasks, who rarely do homework, who remain on the periphery of small-group work, who are reluctant to share their work with others, read aloud, or express their opinions (p.11).

The document goes on to say that, in terms of engagement, children need experiences that: engage them in authentic and worthwhile communication situations; allow them to construct meaning and connect, collaborate and communicate with each other; form essential links between the world of the text and their own world; give them a

sense of ownership of learning and assessment tasks; engage them personally and meaningfully; provide positive and motivational feedback; provide substantial support in reading; and, help them find their own voice.

Some literacy educators have articulated a connection between reading engagement and success in literacy development. Others have specifically linked children's reading success with their ability to engage in reading and their interest in reading as an activity of choice. Tankersley (2003), in writing about what language arts teachers should do to teach literacy, suggested that students must be engaged with the content and with making connections to their own background knowledge in order to have success in literacy development. Allington (2002), referring specifically to the reading component of literacy, observed that the students who spent the least amount of time actually engaged in reading were the poorest readers.

Over the past decade, Finland has been at the forefront in reading literacy achievement in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2003). In examining some of the factors that account for Finnish students' success in reading, researchers, Valijarvi, Linnakyla, Kupari, Reinikainen, and Arffman (2000), identified some of the major determinants as being engagement in reading and interest in reading. Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) acknowledge the significance of literacy engagement as the aim of education, pointing out that, "We want students to be able to read and want to read" (p. 9). This has become the rationale for the development and implementation of programs that have been designed to enhance literacy engagement (Guthrie & McCann, 1997).

Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) examined factors that influence a child's engagement with reading. Some of these are related to the individual while others are environment related. For example, they claim that factors such as beliefs, self-efficacy, interest, expectation, strategy use, and involvement affect children's engagement with reading. They go on to suggest that motivation to read is also influenced by the learner's context. Motivation varies across classroom contexts that emphasize personal inquiry, learner-centred instruction, social interaction, and teacher support for cognitive learning. Turner (1997) notes that, in terms of classroom contexts, open task environments focusing on student choice, control, challenge, and collaboration have been known to enhance the intrinsic motivation for literacy pursuits. Affective and motivational factors can influence reading engagement and, as Wigfield (1997) argues, positive motivation can be maintained by children who have learning goals. While as Cambourne (1988) contends, motivation and engagement are two different concepts, when children are "motivated to want to read for authentic purposes" and can make meaningful connections between reading and their own lives, their motivation to read becomes intrinsic (Braunger & Lewis, 2006).

Cambourne (1988) alludes to the importance of engagement for learning and identifies it as one of the conditions for literacy learning. He claims that when engagement is missing, for children, learning does not usually take place. In Cambourne's examination of some of the factors that influence engagement, he suggests that in order for learners to engage with activities they must see themselves as potential doers of whatever is being demonstrated. In the case of reading, they must see themselves as

potential readers, in order for them to read. He further suggests that children will not see themselves as readers unless they can see some purpose for reading in their lives. The element of risk is another factor which affects a child's ability to engage with reading. Cambourne points out that if the risks are perceived as unendurable then engagement will be avoided (p. 52). Cambourne (1988) and Oldford-Matchim (1994) espouse a role for significant others such as parents and teachers, in reading engagements. They claim that the probability of engagement increases if the demonstrations are given by someone with whom the learner has bonded.

Egan (1986), suggested that there is a relationship between children's engagements, perspectives, and learning. He noted the potential for children's engagement and learning when their perspectives are understood.

> One of the more obvious things about children is that when they are engaged by something their learning power is prodigious. We need some general theory about what turns on that power...a theory characterizing the general contexts of meaning that seem to determine what particular things children will find accessible and meaningful and then engaging and stimulating at different ages or stages in their educational development (p.245).

Cazden (2000), in suggesting ways to embrace what multiliteracies calls for in classrooms, argues that programmes need to recruit learners' previous and current experiences, consider learners' affective and sociocultural identities, and constitute discourse arenas for risk and trust in order to engage them in literacy. Toy manufacturers, video game producers, Disney incorporated, computer technologies and others have

embraced the opportunity to turn on that "learning power" (Egan, 1986), and make their products accessible and meaningful from the child's perspective. Can we learn something from children about these experiences and their engagements with them, that will help inform reading policy and pedagogy and turn on that learning power for reading?

Willms (2003), points to problems that occur when children are not engaged with reading. He claims that many students are not engaged and gradually become disaffected from school and can become disruptive in class. While Willms is referring to young teenagers and education in a general sense, it is generally recognized that many younger children do not become engaged with reading in school. Engagement or lack thereof also affects children's behaviour and degree of interest in school activities generally, and, in particular when the curriculum is not connected with some purpose for learning and to their own lifeworld. In claiming the importance of schools building on children's prior experience and background knowedge, Willinsky (1990), contends that much of the curriculum, especially the basic areas of reading and writing, seems increasingly unconnected to the real lives of students. Moje, et al (2004) urge teachers to help children construct a "third space" of home, community, and peer networks with the "second space" of the Discourses (Gee, 2004) they encounter in school, to help them develop reader identities and behaviours appropriate to engaging in Discourses (Gee, 2004) new to them.

Focusing on pedagogy in the context of the range of texts that primary children engage with, Carrington and Luke (2005) claim that the early years have generally been seen as a domain for the reinstallation, renewal and reinforcement of traditional testing-

based orientations to basic skills instruction, despite children's increased engagements with multimodal texts outside of school. The discourses of early intervention have not attempted to deal with new economies, identities, or families with any strategies other than to restore a print-based order on childhood, development and schooling (Gee, 2001).

Toy manufacturers and multinational corporations, through their texts, are clawing their way into engagements with children. What then are the reading experiences of children within this context? Toy manufacturers, video game producers, Disney Incorporated, computer technologies and other big businesses have moved into children's metaphorical spaces, to engage children in their artefacts and texts over and over again. How are children experiencing reading with these engagements? Confirming Cambourne's principles of engagement, Braunger and Lewis (2006) point out that children need to see reasons and purposes for reading that connect to their own perception of the world. What can children tell us through their perceptions of their reading experiences that will lead to some insight into what can make reading and interesting and engaging experience?

Historical Landmarks in English Language Arts

It is noteworthy that over the past fifty years, the challenges around conceptions of literacy have provided the impetus for groups of literacy scholars to come together for discussions about future directions for English Language Arts and to develop standards which would have an impact on reading.

In 1966, the Anglo-American Seminar, often referred to as the Dartmouth conference, became the first large-scale international conference to focus on questions

about what English is and how it should be taught (Muller, 1967). Twenty-one representatives from the United States, Great Britain and Canada (one representative) met in New Hampshire to discuss issues around the teaching of speaking, reading and writing and making connections among them, offering a unitary rather than a fragmented approach to English.

According to Muller (1967), in his reporting on the conference of guidelines for the teaching of English, this unitary approach was particularly important in terms of the earlier grades where reading, writing, and speaking were being taught separately up to this point. The conference recommended a broadening of the English Language Arts curriculum to include an emphasis on talk, drama activities, mass media, moving pictures, radio, and television (Dixon,1967). Another issue addressed at the Dartmouth conference, was around the challenges that children may encounter in moving from the language of the home to that of the school curriculum. In later years, this notion was represented in out-of-school and in-school literacies (Gregory & Williams, 2004; Brice-Heath, 1983) and primary and secondary discourses (Gee, 2001).

In 1994, 28 years after the Dartmouth seminar, another major conference saw the coming together of a group of ten researchers in the field of literacy. This New London Group met to consider the future of literacy teaching; to discuss what would need to be taught in a rapidly changing near future; and, how this should be taught for a world that now had one billion people speaking English (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The group developed a paper, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures*, which was subsequently published in *Harvard Educational Review* (New London Group, 1996) and

then as an edited book, *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). This International Multiliteracies Project established itself as a global project but comprised only academics from Australia, the United States, and Britain. Two educators from South Africa later became contributors to the edited book.

The team developed a theory, far beyond print literacy, in which there are six design elements in the meaning-making process: those of linguistic meaning, visual meaning, audio meaning, gestural meaning, spatial meaning, and multimodal patterns of meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). They also considered the components of a multiliteracies pedagogy. Situated practice (drawing on the experience of meaning-making in lifeworlds); overt instruction (through which students develop an explicit metalanguage of design); critical framing (which interprets the social context and purpose of designs of meaning); and transformed practice (in which students, as meaning-makers, become designers of social futures) framed the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The New London Group advocated for, "an educationally accessible functional grammar; that is, a metalanguage that describes meaning in various realms for a multiliteracies for the future. These include the textual and the visual, as well as the multi-modal relations between the different meaning-making processes that are now so critical in media texts and texts of electronic media" (New London Group, 2000, p. 77).

Barrell (2000) suggests that new media requires new literacies and notes that, "Whereas in the past literacy connoted a singular ability to critically and intellectually engage the world, the term has now been expanded to multiple ways of engagement"

(Barrell & Hammett, 2000, p. 36). Reading engagement is now contained within the literacy genres and texts of books, Websites, e-mail, video, electronic games, text messaging, and hypertexts. Literacy in the knowledge age is multifaceted and complex. Theoretical and technological advances have transformed literacy from a simple dichotomy into a richer, more complex construct which focuses on the ability to use information from printed texts.

In 1996, another major landmark in the evolution of the English Language Arts came with the development of the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) standards which later had a significant influence on the literacy curriculum changes across Canada, particularly the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation and the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education curricula. The essence of this framework represented somewhat of a global trend as new English language arts curricula broadened the English language arts to include the strands of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and other ways of representing. English language arts curriculum developments worldwide (Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, and NZ) framed the expectations for literacy learning within an outcomes-oriented framework.

The Dartmouth and New London conferences along with the NCTE standards, were contributing factors to a flourishing of literacy research. As well, the combined influence of these conferences and the NCTE Standards contributed to the expanding of the definition of literacy to include competence in all the communicative arts (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000). Within the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation curriculum, the Western Protocol curriculum, the UK National Curriculum, and others, literacy has

come to include: speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and representing through many different texts and contexts.

Some researchers have tried to make sense of the evolution of definitions and conceptions of literacy by contextualizing it within an historical framework. For example, Turbill's (2002) ages of reading philosophy and pedagogy maps literacy theory, conceptions and practice onto a framework of: an age of decoding (1950s-early 1970s); an age of reading as meaning-making (early to mid-1970s- 1980s); an age of reading-writing connections (early1980s - late 1980s); an age of reading for social purpose (beginning in the early 1990s); and, moving into the twenty-first century with an age of multiliteracies where meaning-making involves being able to "read" not only print text but also color, sound, movement, and visual representations.

Alexander and Fox (2004), in their historical analysis of the past 50 years of reading research and practice, mapped the evolution onto eras of: conditioned learning (1950-1965); natural learning (1966-1975); information processing; sociocultural learning (1986-1995); and, the era of engaged learning (1996 - present). For the most part, the theories that did take hold over the years, were embedded in cognitive and developmental learning theory resulting in research methodologies that focused on observations and surveys, and quantitative methodologies.

The past decade or so has witnessed a revisiting of Deweyian (1938) philosophy and a move towards embracing the voices of all, including children. Hull and Schultz (2002) represent this notion in reminding us that, "From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets

outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school" (pp. 76-78). Following from Dewey's ideas, children's electronic games are becoming those mediating spaces between the school and out-of-school discourses.

From a global perspective, countries have come together in two major conglomerations, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with common goals for reading and literacy. Since its foundation in 1946, UNESCO has been at the forefront of literacy efforts and dedicated to keeping literacy high on national, regional, and international education agendas. As conceptions of reading and literacy have evolved, UNESCO has been challenged with developing a definition that is broad enough to capture the complexity and diversity of literacy. Its most recently proposed operational definition, formulated in 2003, states that,

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. It involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and the wider society (UNESCO, 2004, p . 13).

This plural notion of literacy looks at the social dimensions, where literacy is shaped by social as well as educational institutions such as the family, community, workplace, religious establishments, and the state (UNESCO, 2004). However, the "autonomous model" (Street, 2005) is still dominant in UNESCO and other agencies concerned with

literacy. The model assumes a single direction in which literacy development can be traced and it is associated with progress, civilization, individual freedom, and social mobility.

Teachers and schools are being challenged by governments, industry, and professional organizations such as UNESCO, the International Reading association (IRA), and the NCTE to expand the literacies taught in schools. Wagner (1999) aptly suggests that the demands of the twenty-first century require students who can create multivocal as well as multimodal texts (p. 108) paving the way for broader definitions and conceptions of literacy. However, standardized testing of basic skills, rooted in an autonomous and print-centred view of literacy, is still exerting a powerful influence on instruction in classrooms.

With the global emphasis on accountability, testing, and evaluation of reading OECD, in its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2003), has been a major influence on the way reading is conceptualized in classrooms. As schools have been struggling to find the right methods for teaching reading, the assessment programme of OECD has used its own definition of "reading literacy" to guide global goals and assessment. The definition of reading literacy adopted by OECD for the PISA survey states that, "Reading literacy is understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (p. 108). This definition of reading literacy underpins the development of the reading component of the PISA assessment and ultimately determines what counts as literacy in more than 30 countries around the world.

Print and traditional genres continue to be emphasised in classrooms, despite the reality of the infusion of digital texts and their integrated design systems in everyday life. Computer and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have enabled the design of multimodal texts which constitute the majority of texts in social, private, and professional practice. Healy argues that, "Literacy in the digital context has become, in effect, a metaphor for navigating multiple textual landscapes where a variety of media, typologies and structurally designed functions create conditions for literacy that bear little resemblance to each other"(Healy & Honan, 2004, p. 20). Therefore restricting literacy to the domain of print undermines the essence of current conceptions of literacy and the linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

Literacy researcher, Unsworth (2001), in *Teaching Multiliteracies Across the Curriculum*, claims that the notion of literacy needs to be reconceived as literacies and being literate must be seen as anachronistic. As emerging technologies continue to impact on the social construction of these multiple literacies, *becoming* literate is the more apposite description. Cope and Kalantzis (2000), in their redefinition of literacy as multiliteracies contend that literacy teaching and learning need to be an interdisciplinary endeavour, in which the boundaries of literacy with art, drama and music are no longer so clearly defined. They predict that these changes of emphasis, will lead us in the direction of a pedagogy of multiliteracies. Within this pedagogy lies an opportunity to bring the complementary expertise and experience of children and teachers together.

Summary

In summary, this research project cannot begin to determine whether children's perceptions of their reading experiences are indicative of what other children of this age group experience. To do so would contradict the purposes of this phenomenological study which aims to explore the individual lived experiences of a group of children and, as such, could be interpreted as labeling. However, it can listen to the voices and perceptions of those who are typically marginalized and at the bottom of a top-down orientation in the development and implementation of reading policy and pedagogy.

This research builds on previous research on children's perceptions, conceptions of reading, and reading engagement to gain a deeper understanding of how children are experiencing reading. This literature review identifies a gap in the research and guides the inquiry into the unknown. Based on my review of the research, the major criticism that can be leveled at previous work is that there is an obvious gap in that we have not gone directly to children to find out from them about how they experience reading.

This study listens to children's perceptions and takes from the shared lived experiences of a group of children an awareness and an increased level of understanding about how they experience reading. Phenomenological research probes into the richness of the child's experience with reading because, from a phenomenological perspective, research is always about questioning the way we experience the world (van Manen, 1997) and pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to the lived experiences of children. As a method of inquiry, it requires that we listen to their voices and perceptions to learn about how they are experiencing their world.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This study uses a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore children's perceptions of their lived reading experiences. The methodology is informed by van Manen's phenomenology of practice (1990; 1991; 1996;1997; 2002) which supports the notion of exploring practical questions on everyday experiences. The work of Moustakas (1994), Marshall and Rossman (2006), Philpott (2002), Maxwell (1996), Kvale (1996), and Creswell (1998), was also used to reinforce and complement the phenomenological orientation to the methodology. It attempts to add to previous research with empathy for children who are affected by research and policy developments. The study goes directly to a selected group of children, positioning them as participants, to explore their lived experiences with reading. The research question guiding this study is, *What are children's experiences with reading?*

Some of the views of children and reading explored through a selection of literature in the previous chapter indicate that, over the years, knowledge constructed by researchers has been used to legitimate pedagogical practices in reading for children. Recently, however, giving a *voice* to children and recognizing that there is a need to enter into dialogue with them, in order to hear about their views, is gaining recognition among some researchers (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003).

This chapter begins by describing the overall approach to the study and the rationale for using phenomenological methodology. Next, it describes the methods used

during Phases One, Two, Three, and Four, to collect and analyze data. It includes a description of the role of the researcher in the very specific context of the classroom and the research participants. Ethical considerations are outlined and the chapter concludes with a description of the limitations of the study.

Overall Approach and Rationale

This study explores children's perceptions of their experiences with reading in the hope of providing an opportunity for their voices to contribute to research and future developments in reading policy and pedagogy. Many decades ago, Dewey (1938), in his writings on the role of experience in relation to education, suggested that, "... in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society [education] must be based upon experience – which is always the actual life experience of some individual" (p. 89).

The nature of my research question, exploring children's individual lived experiences with reading, calls for phenomenological methodology. According to van Manen (1997), hermeneutic phenomenologcial research edifies the personal insight. I used phenomenology because I wanted to describe children's reading experiences. I used hermeneutic because I wanted to ascribe meaning to these experiences.

The absence of children's insights and perspectives in research on reading, presents an opportunity for using this more descriptive methodology. Phenomenological research uses description in a participative methodology to reveal and extend significant new knowledge of everyday human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It enables me, the researcher, to explore the richness and the range of children's experiences with reading

and to illuminate the essence of their perceptions. This type of study also allows me to integrate my own lived experience with schools, schooling, and the literacy work that I have done in my various roles in education. Rather than creating a distance from the participants in an attempt to be objective, I seek subjective involvement, which is characteristic of phenomenological methodology.

While phenomenological inquiry may be arduous for the novice researcher and risky, especially in terms of children's ability to articulate their lived experiences, I embraced the challenge because it appeals to my sense of integrity and concern about the marginalization and absence of the voices of the individual, the child in curriculum development. This type of inquiry allows me to position myself within the research as a participant who is ready to listen to children as co-researchers and give voice to their lived experiences.

As suggested by Barritt (1986), in his phenomenological work, the strongest rationale for any study is, " the heightening of awareness for experience which has been forgotten or overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped that research can lead to a better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice" (p. 20).

van Manen (1997) compares phenomenological inquiry to other types of research in the following:

Much of educational research tends to pulvarize life into minute abstracted fragments and particles that are of little use to practitioners. So it is, perhaps, not surprising that a human science that tries to avoid this fragmentation would be

gaining more attention. Its particular appeal is that it tries to understand the

phenomena of education by maintaining a view of pedagogy as an expression of

the whole, and a view of the experiential situation as the topos of real pedagogic

acting (p. 7).

Children's perceptions about their experiences and the meaning they ascribe to

these experiences, need to be heard. For this study, phenomenological methodology

allows for spending time with children and hearing directly from them about their

experiences with reading. In keeping with the aim of this study, Merriam (1998), in her

discussion on qualitative research methodologies, claims that "research focused on

discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers

the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and

practice of education" (p. 1).

According to Flick (2002), qualitative research is inherently multi-method in

focus which reflects an intent to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon

being studied. Supporting this claim, Philpott (2002), suggests that to discern the

underlying structure of a phenomenon, a number of reports of a phenomenon must be

gathered (Philpott, 2002). In a similar vein, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) define

qualitative research as a multi-modal or eclectic approach to eliciting phenomenological

data to "represent the world view of the participants being investigated" (p. 3). These

notions of qualitative research confirmed for me that the techniques I would use in this

research with children, must be multi-modal or eclectic and within the phenomenological

tradition. The techniques used to gather information from the children about their reading experiences, included, observation, interviews, and focus group discussions.

The data gathered was used to write descriptions of children's lived experiences with reading. Phenomenologist, van Manen (1997), uses the term "description" to include both interpretive (hermeneutic) and descriptive (phenomenological) elements. In this study, it is this meaning which I ascribe to description. van Manen reminds us that what makes phenomenological description different from other kinds of description is that it seeks to elucidate lived experience which "is usually hidden or veiled" (p. 27). He summarizes his notions of description by saying that, "A good phenomenological description is an adequate elucidation of some aspect of the lifeworld - it resonates with our sense of lived life," and as such "...it is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience" (p. 27).

Phenomenology

According to Moustakas (1994), the term phenomenology was used as early as the 18th century in philosophy. However, phenomenology as a discipline began with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), (Smith, 2007; Moran, 2005). As a descriptive science, phenomenology uses phenomenological description to characterize what the person is experiencing (Smith, 2007). As Husserl's conception of phenomenology was later modified by thinkers such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, the concerns of phenomenology spread from a focus on foundations of logic, science, and knowledge to a focus on human experience and everyday life (Smith, 2007).

Even though the field of phenomenology has evolved and expanded since the early 20th century, some of Husserl's (1917) basic ideas about phenomenological methodology such as the concepts of lifeworld, phenomenological bracketing, and essence, have survived to become key concepts in phenomenology today (van Manen, 1997; Moustakas, 1994), albeit changed by the influence of his successors. For example, scholars, such as van Manen and Moustakas, situate phenomenon and experience in the everyday world, not in the idealistic world, as they have shifted from theory to practice, and from transcendental to existential (temporality, spatiality, corporeality) and hermeneutic perspectives. Husserl's influence emerges in van Manen's (1997) definition of phenomenology as, "...the study of the lifeworld – the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (p. 9). According to van Manen (1997), a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to human science research and writing offers a pedagogically grounded concept of research that takes its starting point in the empirical realm of everyday lived experience.

The focus for this particular study, led me to van Manen's (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology of practice. Phenomenology, as a method of qualitative research, is particularly useful for studying human experiences or phenomena about which very little is known. As researcher, Philpott (2002) writes, "Grounded by a belief that all knowledge is anchored in human experience, phenomenology is an approach to gathering knowledge by defining the experience of participants and exploring how they interpret it" (p. 38). In keeping with this notion, van Manen (2005) writes, that, if we understand

phenomenological method as a way toward human understanding, then it may be possible

that someone can lead us into it.

In declaring the growth of qualitative research, which includes phenomenology,

Kvale (1996) notes that,

There is a move away from obtaining knowledge primarily through external

observation and experimental manipulation of human subjects, toward an

understanding by means of conversations with the human beings to be understood.

Today there is a shift toward philosophical lines of thought closer to the

humanities. These include a postmodern social construction of reality,

hermeneutical interpretations of the meanings of texts, phenomenological

descriptions of consciousness, and the dialectical situating of human activity in

social and historical contexts (p. 11).

He goes on to say that through phenomenological methodology the researcher, "attempts

to get beyond immediately experienced meanings, to make the invisible visible" (p. 53).

In this study, the children's expressions of their lived experiences with reading are

described and interpreted to illuminate the invisible. Their representations of their

perceptions open a window onto their experiences where their truth lies suspended,

awaiting discovery. The "lived experience," according to van Manen (1997), " is the

starting point and end point of phenomenological research", wherein, "a reader is

powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience" (p. 36). van Manen (1997) notes

the challenge of defining and conceptualizing phenomenology, claiming that "a real

understanding of phenomenology can only be accomplished by "actively doing it."

However, he does outline his perspective on the nature of hermeneutic phenomenological research and writing. He writes that phenomenological research is

- the study of lived experience

- the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness

- the study of essences

- the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them

- the human scientific study of phenomena

- the attentive practice of thoughtfulness

- a search for what it means to be human

- a poetizing activity (pp. 8-13).

van Manen (1997) points out that phenomenological research is unlike any other research in that the link with the results cannot be broken without loss of all reality to the results. He suggests that as researchers engaged in phenomenological inquiry,

We must engage language in a primal incantation or poetizing which hearkens back to the silence from which the words emanate" to "discover what lies at the ontological core of our being. So that *in* the words, or perhaps better, *in spite of* the words, we find "memories" that paradoxically we never thought or felt before (van Manen, 1997, p. 13).

Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to elucidate lived meanings as it "attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness" (van Manen, 1997, p. 11). It "allows for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project"

(van Manen, 1997, p.162). "The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 77) and that essence "is adequately described if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner"(van Manen, 1997, p.10).

As a researcher desiring to learn from children's perceptions within a postmodern context, phenomenology provides a plethora of possibilities for uncovering and describing what they experience with reading. According to van Manen (1997), phenomenology takes us on an in-depth, interpretive search into the meanings of a human experience. Children, situated within their lifeworlds, are ideally positioned to lead us in our quest to access the meaning of their reading experiences.

Phenomenological inquiry re-examines the everyday by stepping back from the familiar, the taken-for-granted, in order to reflect on and see things with a newness which is like seeing them for the first time. The methodology of phenomenology is discovery-oriented and, "tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project" (van Manen, 1997, p. 29). Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher sets aside prejudgements regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to cast the study as far as possible from preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon and to be open and receptive to participants describing their experience of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994), supports this notion in his description of phenomenology when he suggests that, "The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in

themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection" (p. 27).

van Manen (1997) reminds us that lived experience has an essence that is only recognized in retrospect and phenomenology seeks to reach a deeper understanding of the essence and meaning of everyday lived experiences. Pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience and a hermeneutic ability to make sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the pedagogic significance of living with children (p. 2). In a phenomenological study, the research participant becomes a "co-researcher" who engages in a dialectic relationship with the researcher to describe his/her experiences.

Moustakas (1994), in his examination of phenomenological research methods, outlines guidelines for understanding human science from a phenomenological perspective. He situates phenomenology within core facets of human science research:

1. Phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from everyday routines and biases, from what we are told is true in nature and in the natural world of everyday living.

2. Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives, until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved.

3. Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings.

4. Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses.

5. Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken interest and concern, and account for the researcher's passionate involvement with and interest in what is experienced.

6. Subject and object are integrated. My perception, the thing I perceive, and the experience or act, interrelate to make the objective subjective and the subjective objective.

7. At all points in an investigation, intersubjective reality is part of the process, yet every perception begins with the researcher's sense of what an issue or object or experience is and means.

8. The data of experience, the researcher's thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging are the primary evidences of scientific investigation.

9. The research question guides the investigation and is constructed in such a way that the primary words guide and direct the researcher in the phenomenological process of seeing, reflecting, and knowing. Every method relates back to the question, is developed solely to illuminate the question, and provides a portrayal of the phenomenon that is vital, rich, and layered in its textures and meanings (p. 58-59).

These guidelines help to inform my phenomenological engagements with children's lived experiences with reading.

The Research Participants

"There are no in-advance criteria for locating and selecting the research participants in a phenomenological study" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107). The researcher, in phenomenological investigations, constructs her own set of criteria to guide the locating of appropriate co-researchers or research participants based on the research question (Moustakas, 1994).

The rationale for choosing the rural school has already been established in Chapter One. My aim for this study was to explore the reading experiences of a selected group of primary children who would be able to articulate their experiences through various modes of representation, including, interviews, focus groups, art, and writing. The children in this study were in Grade Three and were either eight or nine years of age. They were selected from a class of 32 children. For the morning sessions, the class was split between two teachers in two different classrooms. Hence, during the morning sessions my observations were limited to a class of 16 and in the afternoon session the 32 children came together in one class.

Kruger (1988) maintains that participants who are suitable for phenomenological research: have had experiences regarding the phenomenon to be researched, are able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the phenomenon, and express a willingness to be open with the researcher. The children selected for this study embraced the idea of being interviewed and participating in conversations and focus group sessions about their reading experiences. These eight children were also comfortable with the interview and focus group sessions being taped.

van Manen (1997) claims that "It has been noticed by those conducting hermeneutic interviews that the... participants of the study often invest more than a passing interest in the research project in which they have willingly involved themselves" (p.98). This was found to be true. Children would seek me out during recess breaks and lunch breaks for yet another conversation about reading, electronic games, MSN, and other activities from their lifeworlds.

A common question arising in a phenomenological study is with the number of interview participants needed. Kvale (1996) suggests that the researcher "Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (p.101) and, "If the purpose is to understand the world as experienced by one specific person, this one subject is sufficient" (p.102). The important consideration, according to Creswell (1998), is that "The research participants need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (p.55). The children in this study had many experiences with reading and did have a strong interest and willingness to engage in this investigation and to talk about how they experienced reading.

Fictive names were used in order to protect the confidentiality of the children. I had initially intended to use a more benign coding system. However, using fictive names helped me to embed the journey within the experiences of these children and to see them as real people and to validate their voices. Four girls and four boys constituted the selected group of participants for the interview and focus groups, as follows:

Jessica - I first became aware of Jessica in the early phase of the study when she let it be known that she did not know if she could watch the sad parts in the *Charlotte's*

Web movie, which we were watching. Up to that point she was very quiet and reticent about participating in any way. She appeared to be disinterested in school activities. Jessica was a very capable reader who read books and other types of texts. There seemed to be a sadness about her which made me wonder whether she would want to participate in an interview. However, things changed after I invited Jessica to be interviewed. Her quiet demeanour showed a glimmer of excitement as she agreed to be interviewed. In a conversation about reading, she explained that she and her friends did a lot of reading on MSN because she said, "That's the way we talk to each other."

Leah - It was obvious from my first conversation with Leah that she was a very capable reader. She read books and whenever she had a break at school, she played with her electronic games and other types of texts. She was very articulate. She could often been seen during recess and lunch breaks surrounded by other children who watched as she played her games. She had lots of friends and other members of the class were aware of what a good reader she was. Leah had a computer at home. Her siblings were grown up so she was alone with her parents. She enjoyed keeping in touch with her siblings by e-mail.

Jane - An only child, Jane, seemed to be disinterested in much of what was happening in class. She enjoyed talking at great length about her out-of-school experiences from going to the bookstores, to going into the city, to being an only child, to her quiet home, to her ailments. She often made excuses to leave the classroom and to go home. Sometimes she would want to go home because she had some kind of pain. She did not spend much time reading books. She was the type of child who could 'talk the

talk'. She said all the 'right things' about reading. She thought she was a good reader and felt that the person sitting next to her might think she was a good reader too. She found school "*a little bit noisy*" and, because of that, she said that she preferred to read at home. She did not have access to the internet in her home because she did not have a computer.

Melissa - I felt that Melissa had constructed some invisible wall that I couldn't seem to scale. Sometimes her inner feelings manifested themselves through tears as in the day when she brought her ladybug to school and was insistent that she wanted to keep it with her. At the teacher's insistence she did agree to move the ladybug into its own space in a small container. As peers gathered round to try to console her and help her unravel the circumstances surrounding the ladybug it seemed as though the extra attention gave her self- esteem a boost. At other times, her indifference was contagious and her low energy level was surpassed only by her apparent apathy or indifference to anything that went on in class. She seemed to be stifled by a fear of failure. Sometimes she would resist attempting an activity for fear of "*not getting it right*." Her learned helplessness seemed to have become a pervasive handicap for her. She would slump in her chair when she was expected to do anything that involved reading. She seemed to be longing for engagements but her sense of malaise could not sustain it. Sometimes she had brief periods of engagement and communication as when she told me that her university friend knew me. She wondered whether I knew her friend.

Ben - Ben could read but he did not read books much. He liked to play electronic games and watch television at home. He also had a computer at his home. He enjoyed

sending e-mails to his father who worked with the coast guard. He did not seem to like

school and would ask to leave the room a number of times throughout the day. This

seemed to give him a much needed reprieve from the classroom. He used to bring his

thumb wrestlers and wrestling magazines to school. This seemed to be a source of

attraction for his friends as soon as there was a mid-morning recess or lunch break. He

was very preoccupied with wrestling, from his wrestling magazines to conversation about

wrestling, to attending wrestling matches, to including wrestling in his morning prayers.

One morning as he prayed aloud, he said, "*I pray that judgement day will be awesome.*"

This was in reference to the wrestling judgement day which was coming sometime in

May.

Matthew - Especially upon first meeting Matthew, he was very quiet and seemed

very timid and shy. He was disinterested in school and I noticed that on certain days he

would not be at school. The teacher noted that he missed a number of gym days. During

recess and lunch breaks, Matthew would read his Pokemon magazines or Nintendo books

and sometimes play with his friend, Ben. He is a very capable reader and likes reading

about electronic games. He and Ben hung around together and they laughed and frolicked

a lot whenever there was an opportunity. During the interview Matthew had a lot to say.

His father worked on the oil rigs so he liked e-mailing him.

Greg - He was challenged by reading and he often tried to deflect attention away

from his reading challenges by positioning himself as "the class clown,"and the "the

tough guy." When he explained that "*reading was boring,*" I felt that he was trying to

hide his anxiety and weak reading ability by disconnecting reading achievement from the

goals he valued. He liked to talk and had lots to say about reading, books, school, and was

ready to give advice for anyone planning to be a teacher. He felt that he knew what Grade

Three children liked. He often referred to Grade Three children as *"liking to be active."*

He was very inattentive, with a very short attention span. He often asked to leave the

room. Other children would come back and report on him because he was often slow

getting back to the classroom. He liked participating in class but it was often done in such

a way that he would make everyone laugh.

Donny - Because of his difficulties with reading, Donny went to the resource

teacher on a daily basis for individual help. He claimed that he liked mathematics and he

was good at it. He avoided reading whenever possible. He did acknowledge that he

enjoyed reading at his grandmother's house because she liked reading her own books and

they were *"really thick ones."* Sometimes, as he was leaving the room to go to the

resource teacher's room, he looked as if he were ashamed. His comments and behaviour

would become defensive if someone noticed that he was agitated with having to read.

Sometimes he could be heard to mumble his agitations with activities, such as, *"If we

don't have to do anything with this, I'll be so mad."* He seemed to be always 'looking

over his shoulder' to see if anyone heard what he had said.

Data Collection

While I discuss the data collection and data analysis in two separate sections in

this chapter, it is important to note that often in phenomenological research the data

collection and data analysis occur simultaneously. As Henriksson (2004) wrote, "The

minute we set out to describe a phenomenon, we have already engaged ourselves in an interpretive act. We are destined to see "something as something" (p. 59).

Phenomenological investigation is usually conducted using only interviews. However, other types of data are included in this study to complement children's ability to verbalize and describe experience. For this phenomenological study, the data collection process, involved four phases and took place over a period of five weeks through participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. Specific whole class activities were designed for the observation period to enable me to participate in class activities, interact with the children in a participant-observer role, and develop a rapport with them. The data collected during the four phases provided the material of children's perceptions and insights about their reading experiences but the deeper goal in this study was oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon (reading) as an "essentially human experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 62). That is, *What is the reading experience like for these children?"*

van Manen (1997) discusses various approaches to collecting data for a phenomenological study. He advocates for searching "everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its fundamental nature" (p.53). This reduces the risk that conclusions will reflect the biases or limitations of a particular method and it allows for a better assessment of the validity.

Triangulation of observations, interviews, and focus groups can yield a more complete and accurate account of the experiences than any one method can (Maxwell, 1996). This was very important for this study as the nature of the children's learning

styles, their attention spans, their prior knowledge, and their interests, required

triangulation of methods to validate children's representations of their perceptions. At

times I found myself sitting in the lunchroom, observing in the music class, attending the

physical education classes, teaching a lesson, working with individual students, joining in

with the morning prayer routine, moving around the playground, reading to the whole

class, supporting specific class activities, accompanying the children on field trips and

hikes, playing along with their electronic games, and mediating their voices through their

toys as they spoke through their Webkinz and cabbage patch dolls. This is in keeping with

good qualitative research which, according to Merriam (1988):

> ...assumes that there are multiple realities - that the world is not an objective
>
> thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a
>
> highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring.
>
> Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory,
>
> inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than ends. In this paradigm there
>
> are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the
>
> end product (p. 17).

van Manen (1997) admits that the term "collecting" may imply "objective

information" but reconciles this by concluding that it is not entirely wrong to say that

interviewing and close observation involve the collecting or gathering of data. When

someone has related a valuable experience to the researcher, then she has gained

something, even though what is gained is not quantifiable. He explains that, "Lived

experience descriptions are data, or material on which to work" (p. 54).

I had initially planned to make my decisions, about which children would participate in the interviews and the focus groups, based on the observations from phases one and two. However, as I moved through the data collection process, I discovered that the phases could not be kept as discrete as I had initially thought and, as well, everyone wanted to be interviewed. Even unlikely children, who appeared to be very shy within the group context and had minimal input in whole class activities, approached me in a discrete way to ask if they could be interviewed. I embraced this opportunity. As is expected within the phenomenological tradition, the children involved in all phases of the study had experienced the phenomenon (reading) being explored, had an interest in talking about their experiences with reading.

Prior to the data gathering, I went through a process of bracketing my own experiences. This was facilitated by a member of the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, through an interview process (see Appendix D). This phase of the inquiry, referred to as *epoche*, helped me to set aside prejudgements and to prepare me for opening the research interviews with an unbiased, receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994).

Being interviewed by a faculty member who had his own counseling practice, a strong foundation in phenomenological methodology, and an appreciation for the marginalized in matters of education, was a very powerful and profound experience for me and proved to be very beneficial for my research journey. It gave me a sense of the process of being interviewed and it guided me into looking more closely and carefully at my assumptions and biases so that I could approach the interviewing process and the

inquiry generally from a pure and clear stance. It also forced me to take the time to learn to know myself better through reflecting on my past.

Through this unveiling, I was able to revisit my own personal, professional, and practical experiences, and through this revisiting to allow the shared space between the participants and me to emerge. It also challenged me to use myself as *sonar*, to listen to my reactions, and my emotions so as to dig for the hidden meaning that lay just beneath the descriptions that the children offered.

Moustakas (1994), in referring to bracketing or the phenomeonological epoche, suggests that it enables us to see in "an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Subsequent to the bracketing experience, the data were gathered in four phases as follows:

Phase One: Observation

Observation was a key data collection procedure for this study. According to Philpott (2002), it "...can be extremely useful in gaining an appreciation of the lived experiences of the participants" (p. 47), and getting to know the children early in the data gathering process. This was the case for the observation period in this study.

As is generally the case with primary schools, most of the teachers in this school were female. That quickly situated me in the role of teacher with accompanying auras of power and control within the context of the classroom space. Therefore, a key focus for Phase One was getting to know the children and opening up spaces for them to talk in

informal and incidental ways. As well, developing a sense of trust in my purpose for being there was an important goal in this phase of the study.

During this phase, a number of whole group activities (see Appendix E) provided opportunities for all children to share some of their preferences of things to do. These activities included: listing their overall "Top Five Favourite Things To Do;" listing the "Top Five Favourite things to do In School," and listing the "Top Five Favourite Things To Do At Home." I also engaged in reading aloud sessions with the children, during this phase, using picture books from the Department of Education's authorized list such as: *Thank You, Mr. Falker, Jeremiah Learns to Read, Something from Nothing,* and *Wind Over Dark Tickle* CD.

Aside from the activities specified above, I kept presence with the children as much as possible in an unobtrusive but supportive manner throughout the day, sometimes helping them with their work, responding to their questions, responding to their requests to observe their daily activities, spending time with them at recess and lunch breaks, interacting with them, observing them with their toys, electronic games, and Pokemon and wrestling magazines, having conversations with them, and observing in all areas of the curriculum, including music and physical education which took place in other rooms in the school building.

During Phase One, I wrote daily jot notes of my observations. After school I wrote reflections on the daily observations and jot notes. This method of what van Manen (1997) refers to as "close observation" requires that one be a participant and an observer at the same time and involves "an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as

possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allow us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations" (p. 69).

Phase Two: *Observation*

During Phase Two, observation continued as I involved children in more whole-class activities. I was also consistent, during this phase, with the process of taking jot notes and recording my reflections on my observations. While there was some reading aloud during this phase, it was done using *Charlotte's Web*, a chapter book. Being a longer book than the picture books, the reading continued over a period of days. The only picture book that was used in Phase Two was a Caldecott Honor Book, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. This book was very humorous, as a spoof on the writing and creation of stories and books. To stimulate conversation, the *Asterix the Gaul* and *Digit's Clean-Air Adventure* cartoon books, a set of posters, electronic games, and Webkinz and Cabbage Patch Kids were used at appropriate times during this phase.

During Phase Two, the children also engaged in writing activities such as: writing an acrostic poem about reading, and writing a letter to an imaginary friend about their experiences with reading. I observed children over recess and lunch periods engaging with a range of texts such as: electronic games, posters, magazines, toys, cell phones, and puppets. The information gleaned during these activities was useful for getting to know the children and their lifeworld. It helped to open up spaces for them to share their lived experiences with reading, and it helped me to prepare for the upcoming interviews.

Phase Two culminated with the construction of a collage poster through which children represented their experiences with reading. To introduce the collage activity, I led children into a reflection about creating meaning through art and layering of images.

No audio-taping was done for phases one and two of the data collection process.

Phase Three: Interviews

Phenomenological interviewing is the primary data gathering strategy for this study. During Phase Three, the selected subgroup of eight children participated in two individual interview sessions. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest three interviews as being appropriate for phenomenological inquiry: one focusing on past experience with the phenomenon; the second focusing on present experience; and, the third combining the two foci to describe the individual's essential experience with the phenomenon. However, for this particular study, I used two interview sessions. Firstly, I used other data collection sources, in particular the observation and focus group components. Secondly, based on my experience as a primary teacher, I knew that children generally tend to grow tired if they are over-saturated with a particular topic for too many days. So I felt it was very likely that more than two interviews would overtax their attention spans.

Prior to interviewing, I listened to the audio tape of my bracketing experience a number of times. Then transcribing the bracketing experience myself gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own experiences with reading, with different constructions of childhood, and with the political and cultural aspects of reading. Reviewing and reflecting on the description of my own experiences reinforced the bracketing of my experiences.

I began each of the interviews by asking the child whether he/she were interested in having a conversation. After they gave consent, then I proceeded with other questions that were aimed at listening to children share their perceptions and insights about their reading experiences. To help children feel comfortable with talking, it was sometimes necessary to converse about specific things relating to their lived experiences that I had become aware of during the course of the observations of Phases One and Two.

The first interview focused on themes that emerged from observations and activities in Phases One and Two. It also introduced the idea of reading experiences and encouraged conversation about their experiences. All children in the class wanted to be interviewed so even though I had initially not intended to interview everyone, I decided to go ahead with interviewing everyone because all of the children seemed to want an opportunity to talk one on one. I did not want any child to feel left out so I used prudence in making the decision to interview everyone even if it meant that some interviews would be quite brief. While the children were wanting to be interviewed, some of them seemed guarded about what they would say.

The second interview was more in-depth and children were asked to reflect on their first interview and information that I had obtained from the other data collection sources. As well, I used the same statement for everyone at the beginning of the second interview as I explained, "After I finish my study here at your school I'll be teaching teachers at the University. What advice would you like to give these teachers about Grade Three children's experiences with reading?" Children were excited about the idea of being able to tell new teachers about their experiences with reading – some through their

own voices and children, who were more reticent, used their toys, such as Cabbage Patch Kids and Webkinz, to mediate their voices. Having gone through the first interview session, children had some time to reflect on what took place during that interview and the second interview resulted in more conversation than the first.

Phase Four: Focus Groups

Following the interviews, focus group sessions were arranged for the last phase of the study, based on the themes emerging from the interviews. Given that some of the data collected were analyzed already, the focus group sessions provided an opportunity to establish interpretive validity based on the data gathered in the preceding interviews. As children listened to my summary comments, of what I understood to be their perceptions of their reading experiences based on their interviews, they validated them or suggested changes for an accurate portrayal of their experiences.

Even though I had initially intended to have one focus group, I arranged for two homogeneous focus groups along gender lines and combined them for a third focus group inclusive of boys and girls. The main reason for this was that the dynamics of this particular class were such that I felt I could gain deeper insight into children's reading experiences if I separated the focus groups along gender lines, thereby avoiding possible distractions related to gender.

Overall, the children were very aware of gender differences, especially as it relates to particular interests, activities, and friendships. An example of this emerged during the morning prayers. As the boys recited their individual prayers, they generally tended to pray for personal interests, family, and *"all the boys in the class,"* whereas the girls, in

their individual prayers, tended to pray for their personal interests, family, and *"all the girls in the class."*

During the individual interviews, the children sometimes talked about the gender differences in a very accepted and nonchalant way. However, at times it seemed to create barriers to their learning and communication. For example, the boys and girls had particular views of each other. As Donny said, *I don't think the girls would like wrestling because you know they're not that strong. They like different things.*

Ben talked about girls *liking different games, and different books and toys than boys, so it would be better to have the boys in one focus group and the girls in a separate one. The girls like girlie things.*

Despite this phenomenon, in the combined-gender focus group, boys and girls benefitted from hearing about the experiences of each other and discovered that there were some common themes in the way they experienced reading.

Like adults, children often need to listen to others' ideas and understandings to form their own. Creating a supportive environment within the focus group context was critical to facilitating participants' expression of their own views, and having a social orientation, the focus groups provided children with a natural atmosphere (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) for expressing, sharing, and building on ideas and insights about reading. Bringing children together in focus groups added depth and texture to the articulation of the shared experiences with reading. There was a lot of similarity in the themes that emerged through observation, interviews and focus groups.

The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded to facilitate transcription and analysis. Audio-recording was more successful with interviews than with focus groups. This was mainly due to the fact that at times children spoke over each other, in focus groups, in their excitement to participate and share their perspectives.

Data Analysis

The nature of data analysis in a phenomenological study fits with Marshall and Rossman's (2006) definition which claims that it is the means by which researchers order and interpret the data gathered in "a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes" (p. 154). Meaning comes through the interpretative process. They point out that raw data have "...no inherent meaning; the interpretative act brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader..." (p.157).

Creswell (1998), suggests that the data analysis process, for phenomenological research, should: describe the meaning of the experience; identify meaning statements for individuals; group statements into meaning units; describe the experience through a textural description; and describe how the phenomenon was experienced through a structural description. Finally, the overall description of the experience should reveal its essence.

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen, as a method of data analysis, suggests that the researcher:

- Consider each statement, in terms of its significance for the description of the experience, and record the relevant statements.

- List each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. These are the meaning units of the experience and cluster the meaning units into themes.

- Synthesize the meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience and reflect on the textural description.

- Construct a description of the structures of the experience and a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience.

This process is followed for the researcher's account of the experience and for the participant's. After this, a "composite" textural-structural description is written, integrating the individual descriptions into a universal description representing the group as a whole.

van Manen's (1997) phenomenological approach attends to "pure descriptions of lived experience" and, hermeneutically, it attends to "interpretation of the experience via some "text" or "symbolic form"(p. 25). His approach is different from that advocated by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (1998), in that it emphasizes the pedagogical and supports moving into the lived experience and lifeworld of children as research participants. The nature of my study, involving children and their reading experiences, and my personal experiences with being a primary teacher, led me, as a researcher, more naturally to van Manen's approach because of my deep interest in and strong, oriented pedagogical relation to children and reading.

Within his phenomenology of practice orientation, van Manen (1997) identifies hermeneutic phenomenological research as a dynamic interplay among six research

activities. This provided me with a strong rationale for choosing van Manen's (1997) approach over others. The research activities are:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world

2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it

3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon

4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting

5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon

6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (p. 30-31).

van Manen's 'activities' call for an exploration of the concepts of lived experience, essence, and reduction. Such an exploration enabled me to move into children's spaces and their context to 'hear' their perceptions of their reading experiences.

van Manen's (1997) first activity suggests that the researcher must have a deep commitment to investigating the chosen phenomenon so that the lived experience can be fully explored and understood. In this study, I turned to the phenomenon of reading in the lives of primary children because of an interest in understanding how children experience reading in their lifeworld. For many years I have had an interest in learning more about how children experience school, in general. In the 1980s, my masters' thesis was dedicated to finding out the degree of match between children's developmental levels (as outlined by Piaget) and how they were experiencing science activities that they were engaging in on a regular basis. Later, through my literacy work at the provincial Department of Education, I learned that bringing children to reading was a major challenge for the province's education system. I wanted to make sense of this

phenomenon. Casual conversations with primary children led me to believe that children's reading experiences needed to be explored. What is the essence of primary children's experiences with reading? How do they cope with the reading experience? What is the experience of learning to read? Is there something about reading that causes children to bypass it for other activities? What engages children in reading? What is it like to be a Grade Three reader within the context of curriculum policies?

An important focus for van Manen's (1997) second research activity is to investigate experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. In phenomenological research, bracketing or the epoche, a key concept of phenomenology (Husserl, 1985; Smith, 2007; Moran, 2005), is one of the first steps "in coming to know things, in being inclined toward seeing things as they appear, in returning to things themselves, free of prejudgements and preconceptions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). Its aim is to suspend "everything that interferes with fresh vision" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86) so that the researcher can describe in an unprejudiced manner, phenomena as they occur in the lived world.

To investigate the phenomenon as it is lived rather than as we conceptualize it, I used close-observation (van Manen,1997). As I observed I was attentive to facial gestures, body language, and verbal and non-verbal responses to in-class activities, during interviews, and focus groups.

According to van Manen (1997), a problem for phenomenologists is not always that they know too little about the phenomenon to be investigated, but that they know too much and these common sense pre-understandings, assumptions, and existing bodies of

knowledge, can predispose them to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before coming to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question. Bracketing is a way of dealing with this problem, thereby placing one's knowledge outside the phenomenon being investigated.

Even though " bracketing" has been considered one of the key concepts of the phenomenological method of inquiry, van Manen questions whether it can truly be realized. He proposes that instead of trying to set aside what we already know, it is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, theories, and presuppositions, not to forget them but to hold them in abeyance and even turn the knowledge against itself to expose its essence. For being "...aware of the structure of one's own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon..." (van Manen, 1997, p. 57) being explored. In a similar vein, Greene (1995) claims that if we want to help students break through the conventional and the taken-for-granted we must experience breaks with the taken- for-granted in our own lives and "keep arousing ourselves to begin again" (p. 109).

van Manen's (1997) third research activity, reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon, refers to the ultimate purpose of phenomenological reflection which is to try to understand the essential meaning of something. According to van Manen (1997), "This determination and explication of meaning...is the more difficult task of phenomenological reflection" (p.77). It involves a process of reflectively appropriating, clarifying, and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience to effect a more direct contact with the experience as lived. To explore the

structure of meaning, it is useful to think of the phenomenon described in a text in terms of themes. In essence, reflecting on and analyzing a phenomenon (in this study, children's experience with reading) involves trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience (van Manen, 1997). Patterns or themes emerge in the hermeneutic act of seeking to understand the point of view of the participant.

In phenomenological investigations, the hermeneutic circle is a way of explaining and expressing how understanding and interpreting a text is an ongoing process. As more information or data about the text is acquired, an interpretation gradually changes to incorporate that. According to this theory, it isn't possible to truly understand any one part of an experience or text until you understand the whole, but it also isn't possible to truly understand the whole without understanding all of the parts (van Manen, 1997; Moustakas, 1994).

van Manen's (1997) fourth research activity involves "describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting"(p. 30) and applying language and thoughtfulness to the phenomenon so that it reveals itself. Phenomenological writing is at the core of phenomenological research. It is a solitary effort of seeking a "writerly" space for responsive-reflective writing to author a sensitive grasp of that which makes it possible for us to speak as parents and teachers (van Manen, 1997, 2005). In phenomenological writing, the writer dwells in the space that the words open up, the space of the text. It brings the reader to a sense of wonder about particular phenomena. Referring to the challenges of phenomenological writing, van Manen (2005) suggests that it can be

difficult and, "...it is not always clear wherein the difficulty resides...it's like writing in the dark"(p. i). According to van Manen (2005), the difficulty with phenomenological writing often has to do with the phenomenology of meaning, the limits of language, and with the enigmatic nature of words, text, interpretation, and truth.

In the final analysis, the description attempts to capture what the experience was like for the participant, in this case the children. Moustakas (1994) refers to this process as phenomenological reduction where, "the task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also in the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self" (p.90). This is similar to van Manen's (1997) phenomenological research activities which propose, turning to a phenomenon which interests us, investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it, and reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon (p.30). These activities enable the researcher to explore the phenomenon by searching for lived experiences that may lead to an understanding of the essence of phenomenon.

For the interviews and focus groups a major challenge, in this school, was finding a space for meeting with children. During the course of the study, the spaces I used for interviewing and focus groups included the classroom, the library, the music room, the gym, the lunch room, the Principal's office, and the guidance counsellor's office, as they became available. Sensing that I needed to help each child to feel comfortable with the interview process, I began each interview by asking the child to talk about something from their lifeworld, related to reading or otherwise. The children were very comfortable

with this and it made it easier to move into talking about their experiences with reading.

I listened to audio-tapings of the interviews each evening to search for and glean common themes and patterns which I could abstract to guide my inquiry into the individual interviews with children. However, as the research process evolved, it became obvious that some themes were essential and relevant to children's reading experiences and others were not. In some instances, children were anxious to tell about particular personal experiences that were outside the parameters of this study and not relevant to how they experienced reading. Those were not used in any way in the process of data analysis. Themes of disengagements with reading emerged fairly early in the process.

To develop a good sense of the conversations and interviews with children, I did much of the transcribing for the initial interviews. This daily process of listening to the audio-tapings, reviewing the journal entries, and transcribing helped me frame my questions for subsequent interviews and focus group sessions. This circular approach kept me very close to the children's articulation of their experiences and enabled me to be attentive to details in the context of the whole, make adjustments for the next interviews, and return to the details again.

Because of the nature of children's perceptions and sometimes the reticence and lack of clarity in their articulation of their experiences with reading, additional techniques had to be introduced for certain children. For example, Cabbage Patch kids were used to mediate the articulation of one child's reading experiences.

The fifth research activity in van Manen's (1997) approach was that of "maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon"(p. 30) being

investigated. Establishing a strong relation with the question of children's perceptions of

their reading experiences was part of a natural evolutionary process for me, as a

researcher. With a pedagogical orientation, I had, for many years, an interest in listening

to "children's minds" (Donaldson, 1978). From the beginning of the investigation period,

I was very motivated by the prospect of hearing what children might have to say about

their reading experiences. I wanted to take in as much as I could of their 'voices', their

perceptions, in terms of how they experienced reading so that I could represent their

voices through my writing.

van Manen's final research activity involves "balancing the research context by

considering parts and whole"(p. 30-31). van Manen (1997) suggests that a researcher

may, at times, become unsure of the direction to take in a phenomenological study

because there is no particular research design to follow. To avoid having this interfere

with the progress of the study, it was useful for me to keep in mind the evolving part-

whole relation of this study.

Although there is no rationale for structuring a phenomenological study in a

particular way, van Manen (1997) suggests that it may be helpful to organize one's

writing in a manner related to the structure of the phenomenon itself as follows:

thematically, using emerging themes as guides for writing the study; analytically,

reworking interviews into reconstructed life stories or analyzing conversations for

relevant anecdotes; exemplicatively, beginning the description by rendering visible the

essential nature of the phenomenon and then filling out the description and showing how

it is illuminated; exegetically, engaging one's writing in a dialogical or exegetical fashion

with the thinking of some other phenomenological author and treating the works of these

authors as incomplete conversational scripts; existentially, weaving one's

phenomenological description against the existentials (van Manen,1997; Merleau-Ponty,

1962) of temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), and

sociality (lived relationship to others), (pp. 168-72).

Max van Manen (1997) explains the absence of a final conclusion by describing

phenomenological research as a "poetizing activity" where interpretation and significance

are left, in part, to the reader. He explains that, "to summarize a poem in order to present

the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result...wherein we aim

to involve the voice in an original singing of the world" (p. 13). Language and meaning

are critical to phenomenological research. As van Manen (1997) suggests, "In the most

profound and eloquent poem it seems that the deep truth of the poem lies just beyond the

words, on the other side of language"(p. 112) so it is with writing in phenomenological

research.

Validity

Maxwell (1996) describes two types of validity that may apply to

phenomenological inquiry as being description and interpretation. For this study, a

potential threat to valid description is the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data. To

solve this problem, I used audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups and

verbatim transcription of these recordings. I listened to the tapes before transcribing them.

During the observations, I took observational notes as detailed and chronological as

possible. At night I reviewed these and reflected on them as a backdrop for the next day's observation and interviews.

A main threat to valid interpretation is imposing one's own meaning rather than developing an understanding of the perspective of the people studied (Maxwell, 1996). To solve this potential problem, as discussed earlier, I went through the process of bracketing my assumptions and taken-for-granted understandings. In keeping with the notion of flexibility, which is characteristic of phenomenological methodology, I used different types of questions. I tried to maintain a conversational tone with the interviewing to make it more natural and less intimidating for children. To do that it was necessary to have flexibility built in to the interview format. I had to be somewhat spontaneous using this approach because it was difficult to predict prior to the interview where the responses would take us.

I started each interview with a set of questions but did not hesitate with making changes to questions during the interview process when I felt that the child's articulation was not clear. Sometimes the non-verbal cues hinted at a shyness about sharing their insights and perceptions about reading. In cases where a child was reticent about talking and responding, even though they had requested that they participate, I made every effort to help them along with the interview, sometimes using mediating techniques to help them find their own voice through a ladybug, a Webkinz or a Cabbage Patch doll.

Another type of validity threat in this type of study is reactivity. In terms of reactivity threats to validity, Maxwell (1996) claims that for participant observation studies, it is not a serious threat, since in natural settings an observer is generally less of

an influence on participants' behaviour than is the setting itself. I found this to be the case for this study.

Triangulation, as a validity testing strategy, reduces the risk of chance associations and biases. In this study, triangulation was achieved by collecting data through participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. In working with children, it is particularly important to use triangulation because of a number of factors that may pose threats to validity, including children's attention spans, constructions of childhood, and power relations.

Interviews can provide rich data that are detailed enough to reveal the essence of an experience. For this study I audio-taped the two interviews and two focus group sessions and used verbatim transcribing, to ensure a complete and full representation of the children's descriptions of their reading experiences.

Role of the Researcher

I embarked upon this journey with a phenomenological interest in how children experience reading. The confluence of my experience as a primary teacher, my deep commitment to children, and my desire to be empathetic to their perspectives, positioned me to be what van Manen (1997) refers to as a sensitive observer of the subtleties of everyday life, as they pertain to a researcher's domain of interest and in my case it is the practical and theoretical demands of pedagogy, of living with children.

In keeping with my pedagogical orientation, I maintained a participant-as-observer role throughout the study, with the children as participants and co-researchers (Giorgi, 1989). From the outset, I immersed myself in the day-to-day experience of keeping

presence with children while maintaining a hermeneutic distance. van Manen claims that,

"The researcher must maintain a careful balancing of the researcher and participant roles

in order to ensure an opportunity to be reflective without affecting the interactions taking

place"(van Manen, 1997, p. 69).

Lewis and Lindsay (2000) allude to the importance of researchers bracketing their

assumptions when researching children's perspectives and notes that the researcher must

be an attentive listener who is not trapped by her own ideologies or preconceptions. The

bracketing process helped me to pause and reflect on my own lived experiences and to

prepare me to be open to understanding the experiences of the children. It helped me to

bracket and hold in abeyance, "whatever colors the experience...anything that has been

put into our minds by science or society, or government, or other people"(Moustakas,

1994, p. 86). It also enabled me to experience the phenomenological interview process so

that it could be entered into with a certain degree of comfort with the children.

As a researcher, I was very aware of the need to be careful not to overstep the

domain of the teacher, while being mindful that pedagogy, the activity of teaching,

"requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations" (van Manen, 1997,

p. 2). I was mindful of the fact that as a researcher, my role included that of being a guest

in the classroom, a space where, as a teacher, I had been accustomed to serving the aims

of pedagogy for many years. My orientation to the lifeworld of a child is that of an

educator in a pedagogic sense. However, I had to be aware that, as van Manen (1997)

argues, one must always remain strong in an orientation to the fundamental question

being explored and the purpose of the study, which in this case was inquiring into children's experiences with reading.

Particular characteristics of the researcher such as gender, age, and social or occupational role can influence the kinds of questions researchers ask and the kind of information which children feel comfortable about sharing, especially in the current climate of tension that prevails between teaching and learning, and accountability. As a middle class female who has played a key role in the development of literacy curriculum and policy for Atlantic Canada, and is fairly well-known in educational circles throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, I realized that I may be perceived as having some "expert status" and as operating from a surveillance stance, in particular by teachers at the school. I was aware that this could have an effect on the comfort level that teachers and children may have with me. At the outset, I clearly defined my researcher's role to make it clear to the teacher and children that my purpose for being there was to gain an understanding of how children experience reading.

As a female educator, I carried the stereotypical mark of a primary teacher. Throughout the study, and in particular during the first week, I was very attentive to this and engaged in informal conversations to help position myself as someone they could trust. Philpott (2002), emphasizing the need for equity in relationships as a goal for good qualitative research, suggests that, "Striving for equity is not only an ethical imperative; it is a methodological one. An equitable process is the foundation for the trust necessary for participants to be willing to share their experience with an interviewer" (p. 84).

Ethical Considerations

It is important to consider ethical issues from the beginning stages of a qualitative

phenomenological research project. An important aspect of the role of the researcher for

this study was to conduct the research in such a manner that the well-being of the

participants came first and foremost. From the beginning of the design process, ethical

and prudent decisions were made about the nature of the research sample, about issues

around storing the data, and how the audio tapes would be transcribed and issues relating

to methodology. These decisions implied certain ways of interacting with the children

involved in the research project.

This study received ethics approval from the Tri-Council Ethics Committee at

Memorial University, based on the Tri-Council Ethics Code which addresses the

researcher's obligations to participants' rights to dignity, privacy, confidentiality, and

protection from harm. Participants have a right to privacy and to expect that their

anonymity will be preserved and their confidences protected. I committed to not using the

name of the school, the parents, teacher, or children to ensure anonymity for each

participant in any reporting of the findings. I used fictive names in the data collection and

data analysis process.

A Letter of Introduction and Request for School District Approval (see Appendix

A) was sent to the School District Director's office. Approval was granted. A Letter of

Introduction was sent to the Principal giving a clear description of the study (see

Appendix B) and a Parent Information Letter and Consent Form (see Appendix C) were

sent to parents. Signed Consent Forms were received from all parents of the children

participating in the study. Parents were assured that to ensure confidentiality, names of children and parents would not be used in the final report. They were also advised that their participation was voluntary and they could, therefore, withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time during the study.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that there are special considerations when the qualitative researcher proposes a study that involves children. With regard to age considerations, decisions about how to gather data require sensitivity to their needs, their developmental issues, and flexibility. Regarding role considerations, they caution that the age and power differences between adults and children are always salient. To help ensure the children were comfortable with me, I reassured them and their teacher that I was there with the sole purpose of hearing from the children about their perceptions of their experiences with reading. Within the context of collecting children's perceptions and insights about their reading experiences, some children did share information that I considered personal or outside the parameters of the study. Such information was left out of any data analysis to ensure that confidentiality was respected and maintained.

I was always aware that, as a guest at the school, my purpose for being there was to gather information from children that might help inform future policy and practice regarding reading. Within the context of the data collection procedures, I had to guard against disrupting the teacher, children, and class routines. I was also cognizant of the attention span of the children and avoided causing fatigue during the interview process, in particular.

In a phenomenological study such as this one, the sharing of personal information on the part of the researcher can minimize the "bracketing" that is so essential to constructing the meaning of participants. Every attempt was made to minimize this type of sharing.

Regarding ethical considerations, in any kind of research, Eisner (1998) writes about the need to 'exercise sensibility, taste, and that most precious human capacity, rational judgement' (p. 226). In keeping with Eisner's idea, and relying on the experience gained from my years of teaching, I know how important it is to use good rational judgment. At all times, I maintained a sensitivity to ethical issues that arose but had not been anticipated in the writing of my research proposal.

Limitations of the Study

Over the course of the study, I identified some possible limitations. Springtime in this school found Grade Three children and their teachers, preoccupied with CRT preparations. The children often worked on practice activities to learn about the CRT format and to practice working with "bubble sheets." I wondered if children's responses to interviews, focus group discussions and whole group activities could be affected by these activities. As well, the end of year activities such as, field trips, fund raising activities, and, guest speakers, seemed to move some children into vacation mode and focusing became difficult for them at times.

There were also challenges with finding spaces for conducting interviews. I moved around for interviewing and focus group sessions, depending on which space was available at the time. I met in different classrooms, the library, the music room, and the

lunchroom. A couple of times I had to move the interview to the stage of the gymnasium, the principal's office, and the guidance counsellor's office. As children met with me in the different spaces there were, for some of them, initial periods of adjustment at the start of the interviews.

Summary

"The goal of phenomenological research is to describe phenomena as they are lived rather than to give an abstract explanatory account" (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson,1997, p. 46). When talking and interacting with Grade Three children about their perceptions of their lived experiences with reading, I became very aware of how political, cultural, and social dynamics play a significant part in constituting our reality and, thus, our lived experiences and our shared phenomenon.

In a provincial climate of testing and accountability, I sensed that the children in this class were very aware of the role that they were expected to play as Grade Three students.

CHAPTER FOUR

Exploring Children's Reading Experiences

Introduction

Between reading as a label and reading as theoretical, there is a space where theory and practice come together and the nature of the child's experiences with reading emerges. Within this space children are engaging with certain texts, avoiding and disengaging with others, playing the constructed reading game, and finding empowerment. This study works within this space where children's reading experiences are positioned by pedagogy, educational policies, constructions of childhood, and by the theoretical, political, social, and cultural elements embedded therein.

It has been established in Chapter Two, that to learn about children's reading experiences and to find out what reading is like for them, research must go to children themselves, to hear, to see, to describe, and to interpret children's reading experiences. This phenomenological study operates, through children's perceptions, within their lived experiences, where I listen to and engage their voices, to explore their reading experiences, within the context of literacy policy and pedagogy.

To facilitate my initial foray into their experiences, I engaged the children in various activities early in the study. Through individual activities such as: creating a list of "My Top Five Favourite Things To Do"; "Things I Enjoy Doing at School"; "Things I Enjoy Doing at Home"; "Writing a Letter to an Imaginary Friend About Reading"; Writing an Acrostic Poem about Reading"; "Writing a Story"; Creating a Reading Poster," children began to distinguish my role from that of their teachers as I moved into

a shared space with them. They included me in their games, their conversations, and their recess activities.

The daily activities provided a backdrop for the journey into reading experiences as the context of game began to emerge in the space I shared with the children. Their disinterest in and lack of passion for reading, and their disengagements with reading while playing along with the reading game became evident. Through their voices, I heard about how they viewed their role as readers and how they coped with disengagement by playing the reading game.

In this chapter, I examine the nature of reading for the eight children (Jessica, Leah, Jane, Melissa, Ben, Matthew, Greg, and Donny) in this study. These children talked about learning how to read, disenchantments with reading, how they are positioned as readers, playing along with the reading game, and their search for meaning and engagements with texts. It became clear, as children eagerly volunteered to be interviewed, that their perceptions of their reading experiences held truths that were crying out to be heard. Some of these truths became representations of themes that give this study focus and direction. The children's insights into their reading experiences helped to elucidate aspects of reading in their lifeworld which only they, the children, are positioned to reveal.

Through the shared phenomenon of the children's lived experiences with reading, three themes emerge: (1) reading as a disengaged process, (2) playing the reading game, (3) untapped knowledge. These themes are embedded in this chapter, serving as bellwethers of insight leading us into the essence of children's experiences with reading.

Reading as a Disengaged Process

Within the context of this study, the theme of reading as a disengaged process represents a routine journey that children feel compelled to travel. The itinerary for the reading journey has already been established by someone else, the tickets are bought, the children are on the train and the train is leaving. The signposts along the way keep the reading journey on track and help to define it in: learning to read, reading as difficult, reading as work, reading as fearful, reading as books, reading as reading aloud, reading as guided reading, reading as shared reading, reading as CRTs, reading as performance, reading as passing, reading as success, reading as a way of pleasing someone else, reading to go to the next grade, and, ultimately, reading as a means to a job. Children in this study, regardless of their reading abilities, had an intuitive understanding of the imposed course for this journey.

It was as though the children were marching in a procession and the only thing that propelled them onward was the beat of a drum that never stopped except to repeat over and over, "Read to move ahead." Children, in their attempts to comply with the established process and itinerary, produced garbled rationales which revealed a struggle to comply with and keep in step with the reading journey. Greg clumsily tried to conceal his own perceptions and insights as he spoke, with intonation that revealed a mimicking dubiousness and uncertainty, yet, a commitment to buying into the process along with everyone else and not wanting to undermine it.

Even though I don't like the books that the teacher got in that box over there. [pointing towards the box of books] *I know we have to have them*

and we have to read them, too, because they're really important for us

in Grade Three and when you grow up you'll know how to read. But I

likes different kinds of books. My friends do, too. They're not in that box.

In Greg's faltering description of how he experienced reading and books, it was clear that he was acknowledging that the selection of books in the box was part of the reading process and the journey to learning to read. However, his aversion to those books was also clear and his assertion that these particular books did not connect with his reading interests was made abundantly clear in his perceptions of books and reading. The words *them*, and *over there*, and the pointing gesture seemed to all of a sudden increase the distance between himself and the books in the box and it showed his resistance to claiming them as his. They belonged to someone else. They were someone else's choices but not Greg's or his friends. They were part of the reading as a disengaged process, a passionless journey, which did not originate with him. They were outside of Greg's existentials, his lived space, as it were, and he could look at the box from a distance and decide that he was not going there, out of interest, but merely as another step on the reading journey.

When the teacher asked him to take a book from the box, he would thumb through it and finally snatch one that had something on the cover that he could relate to. If he did not find one of those, then he would take one anyway, like all the other children would do, because this was part of the reading as a process journey and you were expected to do that. Greg would sit with the book but couldn't keep his eyes on it. Then he would jump up from his chair and lunge to the front of the classroom to ask the teacher if he could use

the bathroom. He had to escape the space which confined him, the box, the books, the classroom, the desk, the door, the board.

As we embarked upon this journey together (the eight children and I) into their world of reading experiences, children were reticent and uncomfortable with any interruption to their taken-for-granted, habitual, day-to-day patterns and processes. On one particular day, the teacher told them that they could move their desks anywhere in the classroom. Their reaction to this experience with its inherent freedom of choice and participation overwhelmed them as they blindly and chaotically went about moving their desks from one space to the other in search of the perfect space. It was as though they were on a boat without an oar, or a treadmill or a Merry-Go-Round and it was easier to stay on than to get off. It was easier to leave their desks in the designated spaces decided on by someone else than it was to deal with the uncustomary freedom. Jane's frustration with the sudden infusion of choice into the daily routine was revealed through her tearful call to her teacher.

He won't let me move my desk to that space.

The children were also challenged with their articulations of their reading experiences. Sometimes a delay in responding meant that they were trying to find a way of saying what they so much wanted to say about reading and school. However, from their vantage point, being a female and an adult, I presented as a teacher. In children's perceptions, primary teachers were female and adult, so they were guarded with their candor to me, especially in the early days of the study. As if daring me to speak the

unspeakable, Donny looked up from the book he was handling and with eyebrows raised asked,

Did you like reading when you were in Grade Three?

The children's focus was taken up and preoccupied with the expectations for reading which were assigned through policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and accountability regimes. Everyone knew that the adults wanted it this way. They were in control of reading, the books that were bought for the school, the pages that you had to read, the worksheet stories that you had to read and answer questions on. These reading experiences were legitimated by adults. Matthew towed the line to fit with the accepted process.

I don't think Moms and Dads like Pokemon but I do and my friends do. If we had stuffed Pokemons we could have them along the hallway and in the classroom. It would be fun to come to school.

Matthew was a very serious, bright boy and a very capable reader but he wasn't seen reading much, except when he brought his Pokemon and Nintendo books to school. He sometimes read those during the morning recess and the lunch breaks. His lisp and stuttering sometimes inhibited him from responding in the large group. However, during the interview he seemed to thrive on the opportunity of giving his perspectives on reading. He had lots to say about it. This surprised me because he usually remained aloof, gave a quiet laugh when someone tricked the teacher or if someone blurted out a comment that was in conflict with the established things to say in the classroom. He was very direct and forthright about who he enjoyed talking with.

I would rather talk to my friends than grownups because a lot of grownups don't know about the things we like reading.

Initially, children's voices were veiled with their attachments to notions of reading as process, a journey from one place to another. It was a struggle for them to move beyond goals of accountability aimed at improving and readying for some future purpose - to pass, to please, to perform, to improve, and to achieve. As Leah talked about the reading CRTs and how important reading is, she took on the voice of an adult with an indifference that blatantly and symbolically deprived her of her own voice. In her description of her experience, she became a performer with a well-rehearsed role. Within reading as process, Leah understood that reading was a journey with an itinerary that was laid out for her by others and she had to keep in step, be on time, and march to the invisible drummer on this journey to be successful, to reach a goal, and to realize a pre-determined future purpose. Leah makes mention of the importance of CRTs in her reading experiences. The power of these tests is driven home by the importance her mother places on them.

Reading is really important because when you go on to high school the teacher won't let you pass on to the next grade if you don't know how to read. My mom said if you don't pass your reading CRTs it will stay in your file, and when you go to high school, the teachers will see it and they'll know that you're not a good reader. So it's really important to know how to read. Sometimes my mom says, "That's a good girl. You got a real good mark." She gets really excited and she hugs me.

Despite the provincial curriculum document's stated emphasis on reading engagement and relationships with text and multiple texts, Leah's perception represented a very different experience with reading, one that lacked passion or interest in any particular texts and any kind of engagement or relationship with texts. Her reading experiences were of a compulsory journey that was a means to an end, where particular signposts guided her along the way. In her description of her reading experiences, she revealed an indifference to any connection with the texts. The reading journey and her commitment to reading as process was related to achievement and the importance of passing the tests. Reading as process and as a journey was about pleasing others, in particular, her mother. This was true, as well, in her relationship with her teachers and peers. She was anxious to do well in reading to please them. Her peers looked up to her as a good reader. Leah's perception of her reading experience reveals an experience that is far removed from the reading as engagement focus in the primary reading curriculum. Making personal connections to various texts are secondary to the process of the reading journey and to pleasing others, in her perceptions of how she experiences reading.

Part of the reading journey involved learning to read. Even though the children knew that they needed to learn how to read, they seemed to have very little awareness of learning to read and were challenged with trying to articulate any insight into that part of the process. Some children associated learning to read with comfort, love, joy, and engagement with a significant other in the home but were aware that in school reading was distinguished by a new language of outcomes, achievement, assessment, standards, and CRTs. Jessica, as a good reader, couldn't remember how she learned to read or about

being taught to read. Her perceptions of that experience were linked with her mother, in the comfort of her home.

> *My mom helped me to learn to read when she used to read to me before I went to school, even before I went to kindergarten. I liked reading then. She used to read a book to me every night before I went to bed.*

Jessica couldn't recall anything specific about learning how to read other than the fact that her mother read to her. She attributed her learning to read with being read to. Her intonation as her voice hung on to the "then" and the finality in the statement, "*I liked reading then.*"seemed to be a conclusion for Jessica. It was as if she was grieving for a joy that was no longer there in the new language of the school.

Other children talked about learning to read and told of their experiences with the letters, sounds, and words, and about *moving from easy books with just a few words on a page to more difficult books with a lot of words on each page*. The children's insights into their learning to read experiences were connected more to the mechanics of learning to read than to any engagements with reading as an activity of interest. Jane explained her perceptions of her experiences with learning to read.

> *I think I can remember when I was two, my mom got those little books for me to read. Then she used to teach me to read, like...she goes...du...ah...ah...like that and then I go...dah. That's when I would learn how to read. My kindergarten teacher would help me to sound out the words and the letters too.*

In the children's descriptions of their learning-to-read experiences, the act of learning to read seemed separate from real engagements with particular texts and

controlled and guided by someone else. For some, the process seemed to be perceived as mechanical and somewhat of a template where children were positioned as subjects who needed to learn the formulaic processes of reading from some outside agent. For others, learning to read was part of the reading as process journey and going from one book to the other. As Ben said,

First, I used to have the little books with just a few words on the page and a lot of

pictures. Then I would read the harder ones and they had a lot of words.

In the process of learning to read, Ben's perception of the experience did not include any reference to engagements with particular texts. However, as was previously noted, Ben did talk a lot about his wrestling magazines and the Backyard Hockey game on the internet. From within children's descriptions of the reading as process, there emerges a struggle for harmony with reading policies, texts, mastery of skills, classroom environment, and with constructions of childhood that position children as subjects.

As conversation became easier for them, the children talked about the 'nuts and bolts' that held together their notions of their reading experiences. They talked about what reading meant to them through reading as *big words*, reading as *bedtime stories*, reading as *sounding out words*, reading as *difficult*, reading as *work*, reading as *tests*, reading as *homework*, reading as *intimidating*, reading as *failure*, reading as *boring*, reading as *flat*, as *aloneness*, and reading as *disengaging*. Collectively, children's perceptions of their lived experiences with reading became a lens through which their insights shed new light on reading as a process. Reading for them was a journey of melded sequences which situated the children as passive participants who were at the

command of invisible and unwritten orders to perform. The lived experiences of reading were hi-jacked by the curriculum and accountability policies that were designed to turn children into readers who would go to reading as an activity of choice.

Within the context of reading as a disengaged process, as a journey toward some goal that is outside of connections to texts, pedagogues (parents and teachers) become the bellwethers guiding the reading experience for children. They make the decisions about what constitutes reading and what children are expected to read and why reading is important. Leah's voice added a clear message from the larger existential sense about relationality when she said,

> *Every day I go home my mom asks me about the CRTs and, if I tell her about my concerns, she would say something quick about it. I would rather talk to my friends about any concerns that I have about the CRTs or about what I'm reading because they know all about it. I'm afraid I won't do very well on the tests, though. There's a rumor going round that, if you don't do well on the CRTs, you won't be able to go to Grade Four.*

Journeying with these children, I sensed that at times, by virtue of the fact that I was an adult and female, I became the invisible person [teacher], keeping this journey on track and on schedule. I was someone that they did not know but had to impress, like *the person* they talked about who was correcting the CRTs and the one that Greg referred to when he expressed his thoughts about CRTs. In his attempt to be true to the reading journey and to be politically, culturally, and socially correct in doing so, Greg's facial and body expression, as he nervously rubbed his hands together, revealed a tension and a loss

of identity as his conversation about reading followed the guidance and purposes set by the bellwethers.

> *I really like doing CRTs in reading because they're not very hard. So I do my best when I'm doing them because I know that a teacher from another school will correct them and they don't even know me and they might not even know where my school is. They probably live far away from here. So they won't know if I can read and I don't know them either.*

Greg's description revealed his sense that in this process there is a pronounced loss of control of his perspective and someone outside his own classroom was a gatekeeper to his reading success. Despite his discomfort with this, he accepted it as part of the reading as process and part of the reading journey. While he claimed, to *like doing CRTs,* the tension in Greg's face and hands said something different. Greg understood the reading journey to be an obligatory process involving books, and if he opted out of that process at any point along the way, then he must somehow find his way back into the process, in order to realize the goals of reading. Greg seemed to have a fear of the unknown and that *someone* outside of himself who was in control of whether he passed or failed. I *have to be good so that invisible person won't do anything to me.* His experience of reading was embedded in a fear that someone might bring the gavel down on his reading journey.

While the children were not involved in the process of developing the ultimate goals and expectations for the primary reading curriculum, the influence of the outcomes

permeated their articulations of their reading experiences, as the surveillance of outcomes and accountability systems prevailed.

Pedagogical orientations and perspectives on reading are usurped from policy and curriculum frameworks as outcomes, goals, assessment, testing, and success. They become the invisible chains that tether children to notions of reading that are constructed by adults and used to legitimate control over them. Greg understood the reading process as a journey toward an illusive goal with someone else in control. This loss of control over his reading journey forced Greg to comply and speak with a voice that was not his own.

> *The CRTs are really exciting. We have to know how to read, you know, and the CRTs can help us to learn to read. Sometimes they make me nervous, though [with an uncomfortable smile]. But my mom said that I have to pass the CRTs. If I don't pass the CRTs, I can't go on to Grade Four. Even though it's hard sometimes, I know it's good for me.*

Reading as connections to texts, as engaging, and as that experience which helps to make us thinking and reflective human beings, as that which feeds the spirit and the imagination, is lost in disengagements from texts as Greg alights and lingers too long on the CRTs for reading and on reading as running the gauntlet, to pass and to go to Grade Four.

Children moved tentatively within the context of what they intuited to be the set and established reading policies and practices that were part of reading as an impersonal, disengaged process. Their discomfort and insecurities with reading were silenced by the

reading journey, by reading as a disengaged process which was constructed by adults to legitimate control over them and their reading experiences. Much of the reading process was carried out in accordance with what children perceived as society's perspectives of reading from within a world of teachers, parents, and government bureaucracies. As Donny followed the reading instructions to construct a paper folding activity, he mumbled under his breath his frustration with the guidance and control coming from teachers.

I'm folding this now, but if we don't have to do anything with it after it's finished and this is wasting my time, I'll be so mad [making a facial gesture that showed his impatience and agitation with the reading activity]. Somebody's gonna know.

Jane accepted the reading as process as a monotonous routine. She did not feel the need to understand the routine or the rationale for it, but she knew that it made her happy when it resulted in illusive success. She told about how happy her mom is when she does well on her reading tests. Her voice spoke of routine and indifference. Descriptions of reading as process did not include any engagements with reading. Her joy and satisfaction sprang out of the reading process as a course of action whose purpose for being was to achieve success for some future goal. Jane's perception of her reading experiences seemed linked with reading as a series of activities that one must engage in to do well on a test, to succeed, and in doing so to please her parents.

I likes the CRTs because my mom gets really excited when I gets As in my reading tests. Then I feels right good because I know I did good.

Ben, whose dominant texts of engagement consisted of Pokemon and wrestling magazines and electronic games, uncomfortably gave voice to this phenomenon.

Ahhh...I don't read a lot. But I want to read four books every day. When I think about reading I feel happy because if we don't know words we can learn them when we read. I like reading a lot. I know that reading is really important because you can't pass if you don't know how to read. So I have to read.

Ben's comment, on *wanting to read four books a day*, says a lot about his perception of what he sees as not only the established and accepted text, the books, but also of reading lots of books. Ben regularly brought his wrestling magazines to school to read and share with his peers during recess and lunch periods. Wrestling was very much a part of Ben's lifeworld. He went to wrestling matches and liked to talk about them during break periods at school. Sometimes his morning prayers were directed towards some aspect of wrestling. One such prayer was,

I pray for my family, all the boys in my class, and I pray that judgement day [for wrestlers] *will be awesome.*

Even though Ben enjoyed reading the wrestling magazines and read them at every opportunity, it is interesting that in his talk about reading he did not refer to these magazines. For Ben the reading that was part of the reading process was the reading he did in books. Even though the Primary English Language Arts Curriculum Guide (1999) espoused a broad definition of texts which included magazines, Ben's perception of the reading process included books as the dominant text for reading.

Some children opted out of the reading journey. Fear of failure and of undermining the accepted reading process deprived them of motivation and enthusiasm. It deprived them of their quest for meaning. Even though the process was instituted and programmed to mold and shape to obtain desired results, some children could not disavow their inner voices. As one child, Melissa, struggled with trying to explain her resistance to filling in bubbles on a practice for the CRT bubble sheets, she found the strength and self-assuredness to opt out of the forced reading process. With her hand under her cheek as if to keep her head from falling, Melissa reluctantly and tentatively mumbled,

> *I don't want to do it and I'm not going to do it. I don't know how to do it.*
> *I'm not going to even try. What if I get it wrong? What will happen then?*
> *Can I take it out with me when I go to the resource teacher?*

Like Greg, Melissa experienced a loss of control. However, she judged her reading to be too inadequate to continue the journey of reading as a process. She revealed a sense of insecurity about her reading ability and a sense of being out of step with the process, the reading journey. The process, for her, was about journeying towards a pre-set goal, towards someone else's idea of success, that was beyond her grasp. As she pushed the worksheet away there was resolve in the gesture. Her experience with reading was moving through a monotonous set of routines, established by someone else. Her only way of dealing with something that she was not a part of was to withdraw from the process and the reading journey.

In the classroom, Melissa's insecurities were manifested in ways that gave the appearance of indifference to reading. Her eyes seemed to look beyond everything that was a part of her classroom environment. Through her actions she emerged as disengaged, disinterested, indifferent, and out of step with the reading as process. Some future purpose and rationale beyond 'the now' could not sustain her interest in continuing the reading journey for the sake of passing, moving to the next grade, being a good reader in high school, being successful, illusive goals, and doing well on the CRTs. The routine activities left her disengaged as it embodied her in a kind of malaise that consumed her reading potential. The activities that constituted the reading as process were too disconnected from her lived experiences and too far away from her lifeworld. They were too difficult and involved too much risk and pain. Melissa wanted her purpose for any engagements to be situated in 'the nowness' and the immediate. Her engagements and her lived experiences were with 'the now'- the ladybug she brought to school, her drawings, folding paper, going swimming, and vying for the attention that she did not receive from her reading achievements.

Representing her ideas and feelings through puppetry, drawing, coloring, and cut-outs provided a way out of the reading as a set process and the means for Melissa to withdraw from the reading journey. She snatched the reins of control over her reading journey and got off the merry-go-round of activities which constituted reading as process. As she slumped towards the front of the classroom to read from a book, her movement unveiled a thirst for meaning and engagement, some connection. Her disillusionment with the reading process prevented her from experiencing reading as meaning, and as

relationship between herself and a text. It was a process of commitment, procedures, obligation, testing, worksheets, performance, requirements, power, work, and perhaps failure without her special teacher. Continuing this disengaged, passionless journey of reading as process meant that Melissa had to leave the classroom to go to a resource teacher for special help. She did not like doing that but it allowed her to get away from the reading journey and experience reprieve from the itinerary which had become burdensome for her.

Ben talked about, *Grade Three children not being allowed to choose their own books*, and Greg talked about his experiences with not liking the books, *in that box over there*. Both Ben and Greg accepted that even though they did not like the books in the box and would like to choose their own books, they knew that as part of the reading process it was taken-for-granted that they would read them, when they were asked to do so. They understood that reading them would help them to move to the next grade. The uncertain fate of not reading them was that they could have to stay in the same grade next year. Greg also referred to the invisible teacher, one that he did not even know, who would be correcting his CRTs and finally how powerful he felt when he was sitting in the interview and focus groups and being asked about how he was experiencing reading. The lived other was very much a part of the way Greg situated himself. Greg's perceptions of his reading experiences were knotted together within accountability regimes.

With an uncomfortable laugh, Donny dares to talk about a place outside the reading journey of school. He talks about how he feels about this disengaged process, this reading journey which is out of his control.

I don't like school. I don't think anybody likes school. I don't like reading in

school. Sometimes I like it but it's hard and we have to read those books that the

teacher picks. I like reading at my Nan's house. When I go to visit her she reads

big books. I read there too. I like reading there.

Then he gets back onto the train with the established itinerary, with the realization

again that reading for him was not about enjoying reading and particular texts but rather

about staying with this disengaged process, this reading journey, and some set and

established purposes for reading not connected with his lifeworld and his interests.

Testing was a compulsory step in the reading process. Donny's reference to his morning

prayers echoed back to the reading journey.

I'm nervous about the CRTs. This morning when we said the prayers with Miss, I

prayed for the reading CRT to be easy...cause I want to pass.

The passionless reading journey camouflages the real purposes for reading and

children are disenfranchised by the very process which is designed, through policy, to

support them in their reading to achieve, to think, to critique, to create, to succeed, to pass

a test, to go on to the next grade, to do well in school, to learn, to engage with texts, and

to acquire knowledge. For the children in this study, disenfranchisement and opting out

of, or playing along with, the process of reading, begins. Within disengagements,

associated with reading as a process, children embrace any opportunities to seek out and

move into their own spaces with their choices of texts where they can become engaged

participants in a meaning-making process. Meanwhile in the reading journey of school,

they play the reading game. They comply with the forced participation in a disengaged

reading process. In the absence of meaning, children resort to ways of coping with disengaging activities. They know the rules of the reading game, so they play along.

Playing the Reading Game

Human beings are meaning-seeking creatures. Their quest for meaning begins in childhood, with a sense of purpose. For the children in this study there was a profound sense of disconnect between any real interest and purposes from within their lifeworld and reading. The realization that any potential opportunity for reading engagement is highjacked, by the reading as a process, triggers children's alienation from authentic purposes for reading. With real meaning, authenticity, and significance absent from their reading experiences children find ways of prevailing and coping by playing along with the reading game. An imposed journey and a forced process, becomes a game, not unlike other attempts to find play in childhood activities.

The children in this study were cautious about securing and reinforcing their positions in the reading game. They seemed to experience a sense of trepidation at being a member of the reading game and being in tune with the world of reading governed by policies and legitimated by adults. Even though children were not involved in developing the provincial curriculum framework and reading policies, they had an intuitive sense of what the parameters were and what they needed to say in terms of playing the reading game. One of the rules of playing the reading game is pretending that it's not a game. Not only did they know it as a game, but they also intuitively knew they had to be accomplices in not naming it, in pretending it had more significance than it did.

Donny found reading challenging but he tried to play the reading game by saying the accepted things about reading. Saying positive things about reading was part of the reading game because he knew that, for some reason, reading was important. However, there was reticence in Donny's voice as he said what he thought needed to be said to keep him in the reading game.

> *Ah...ah...ah...I sort've like it [reading]. Well...ah...I sort've like most books but I don't like ones ...like normal books...like...ah...I like fairy tales mostly but...like the real ones...I don't really like them.*

I interpreted this to mean that Donny was trying to avoid stating directly that he did not like the books that he was expected to read in school, those that he deemed to be the *normal books*, the ones that were authorized for their reading. Whenever the authorized Nelson Language Arts anthology became the focus of a reading lesson, Donny tuned out. He found other things to occupy his time. He teased his friends and made excuses to leave the classroom.

Sometimes children did not seem to be aware that they were playing the game of reading even though, as they talked about their lived experiences with reading, I could hear in their articulations about the rules of the reading game. They knew very well what they needed to say about reading. They knew they had *to do reading, enjoy reading, read a lot, read to learn, read to be successful in school, read to go on to the next grade, read certain books, read to please parents, read to impress the teacher, write reading tests,* and *read to impress friends.* They knew that part of the reading game involved being able to impress the person who would be correcting the CRTs and to fill in the blanks on a

workbook sheet to practice for the CRTs. Some children *played the game* well because they had learned what counted in reading while others were not consistent with *playing the game*. Donny talked about the way he felt when he went out of the classroom for reading one day. He tried to suppress his discomfort with reading and going to the resource teacher for reading.

> *Uhhh... uhhh...I just look like I don't like to go out for reading. I'm like that sometimes. I don't know why. But I like reading. But I just do that* [shrugs his shoulders].

As Donny left the room, for reading, his lived body spoke volumes about how he felt about reading, going outside for reading, and being separated from the other children. It was much easier to continue this passionless reading journey, on the train with all the other children. His furtive glances revealed a discomfort with the thought of being watched as he left the room. Sometimes he would mumble defensively,

> *I like reading. I know how to read. I'm really good at math, though.*

Later in the discussion the same boy stepped outside of the reading game. In sharing his perceptions of his reading experiences, he helped me to unravel my initial observations of his behaviour and attitude toward reading. He revealed something akin to an acknowledgment of the essence of his experiences with reading as he said,

> *Yeah, the reason I do that* [referring to the way he slammed the door as he left the classroom to go to the resource teacher] *is because I get upset when I have to go out for reading because I hate reading. I don't like going out to the other room for reading either. I like math but I don't like reading.*

As I journeyed with these children through their articulation of how they experienced reading, their talk and actions and the way they played the game of reading revealed an absence of meaning within passionless reading experiences. Sometimes it wasn't the words within their descriptions of the reading experiences that unveiled their perceptions but the inadvertent messages that came from my observations of their writing, their art, from a shrug, from a mumble, a sigh, or a fleeting glance over the shoulder. For girls and boys alike, their reading experiences seemed to represent periods of overwhelming disengagements and absence of meaning.

Being springtime, and the season of CRTs, the occasional school announcements regarding CRTs refereed the behaviours in the corridors and alerted the children to the value and significance of the testing program for their reading achievement. It reminded them that the reading test was an important part of the reading game. As participants in the reading game, children viewed the testing as the bridge to the finish line and then on to a new grade, new classrooms, new teachers, and home to where their finish would be celebrated. Greg's description of this perspective is clearly articulated.

If I do good on my test my mom and dad takes me out to a restaurant. They get right happy. That's what they did before and sometimes my friend comes and my little brother comes too. It's fun. I feels right proud. I think we might go out to a restaurant this year, too.

Greg's pleasure that he associated with reading was with *passing* and *doing good on a test*. For the children in this study, playing the reading game becomes a way of coping with and living in the space where theory and practice come together in

experiences. Children readily described reading as being important within the context of a journey towards adherence to standards embedded within reading policies, and desires to pass Grade Three.

Knowing that they were not being judged or evaluated in this research study seemed to give the children a sense of freedom which was enabling for their voices and for the sharing of their experiences with reading. Even though Jessica was a very capable reader she seemed to be particularly preoccupied and nervous about testing. This came through in her reference to how she felt about the interview and the discussion about reading.

> *I was uncomfortable at first, when the interview started, because I thought it was like a test. But, when you told me that it wasn't a test and it wasn't like the CRTs, I felt better and it was fun because I like talking about my opinions. I like talking about how I feel about reading.*

Jessica was generally very quiet and withdrew from the classroom activities and the conversations at school. As soon as she was assured that she wasn't being evaluated she discovered that she had a lot that she wanted to say about reading.

At times the realization, that they had 'crossed the Rubicon' with the marked absence of reading from their lists of favourite activities, became a source of consternation and anxiety as children realized that the unveiling of their interests had revealed an unconscious aspect of their perception about reading that had been veiled within the 'reading game' up to this point. In defensive moves, children made attempts at

justifying and maneuvering themselves back into the reading game as they thought of appropriate and agreeable things to say about reading.

The number one rule in playing the reading game was to maintain a loyalty to pretense. While some children tried to hide their feelings about reading within the context of playing the reading game, their articulations revealed a loyalty to the forced game of reading, thereby silencing their own voices. When Ben realized that he had not included reading in his list of favourite things to do, he found his way back into the uncomfortable security of the reading game as he tried to rationalize his omission.

I didn't pick reading for one of my favourite things to do because I thought I had to pick just my top five favourite things. But...ah...ah...you know...if I had to pick my six favourite things..well... I might have picked reading for number six.

It was as if Ben suddenly became aware of his lack of adherence to the rules of the game and needed to say something good about reading to keep himself within the safety net of the reading game and in harmony with the accepted attitudes and knowledge about reading. He knew that reading was valued so he seemed to think that it was important for him to include it as one of his favourite activities. To maintain harmony, he had to get back into the reading game and play along with it. Since he sensed that it was expected that he would like reading then he needed to say it out loud.

Another boy knew what counted in the reading game and knew what he needed to say about books and reading in order to maneuver himself back into the game. There was a look of relief on Matthew's face as he awkwardly found his way back into the reading game when he responded to a question about movies and books with doubletalk.

I like the book <u>Charlotte's Web</u> more than the movie because you need to read

books. That's how you learn to read. The book can help you to learn to read and

then you can watch the movie later. Even though I really do like the movie I like

the book, too.

Matthew felt that in order to stay in the reading game he had to prefer books because liking books was part of the game. As he found his voice and the strength to articulate his perceptions, he later went into a great deal of detail about why he did not like the books that he had to read in school. He made suggestions about how improvements could be made to reading in school.

The children were cautious as they made subsequent moves to secure and reinforce their positions back into the reading game. In the silence and pretense there is a sense of security. The sense of security was reinstated when they realized that they were again 'in tune' with the world of reading governed by policies and controlled by adults. Even though children were not involved in developing the provincial curriculum framework and reading policy documents, they had an intuitive sense of what the parameters were and what they needed to say in terms of playing the reading game.

The number two rule was to prove that they liked reading. Ben's need to prove that he liked reading seemed to be part of the same game that Matthew was playing, when, in his game of pretense and loyalty to the reading game, he talked about his preference for the book over a movie. However, in Matthew's summary sentence, he seemed to be saying something different as he tried to ease his way back into saying what he seemed to really prefer, which was the movie.

The number three rule in the reading game was to understand your role as a player in the game and to play that role as it was supposed to be played. In the reading game children seemed to understand that pedagogues have particular roles where they are not only players with particular positions but also the ones who referee, monitor, and control the reading game. The reading game emerged as an unconscious experience where children, each child, had a particular role and they could articulate their roles. Within this game, adults controlled the decisions about what to read, choosing reading books, reading tests, reading worksheets, reading time, reading spaces, reading success, when to read, reading homework, where to read, read alouds, paired reading, buddy reading, shared reading, and guided reading. Children understood and accepted the routine roles of pedagogues and children within these contexts. They played along with the reading game in a mechanical fashion within the unwritten parameters of offense, defense, and rules, where adults were the authority figures, in control, outside the child's lifeworld, and off-base.

Throughout the study, it was clear that the children knew the bellwethers for reading, the reading game, some tangible and some intangible. These guided and guarded their voices. They talked about books, tests, teachers, computers, CRTs, parents, pathways, time allocated for reading, people correcting the CRTs, government, and school environments. They also seemed to have an understanding of their particular roles framed within the context of these reading experiences. They seemed to know what was expected of them, the particular role they played and how to navigate within these roles in

harmony with reading policy and pedagogy. They seemed to be aware that certain knowledge and ideas about reading were set.

Others who were challenged with reading seemed to be keenly aware of what was missing from their reading experiences and perceived the game of reading as being played out on an unlevel playing field. Donny, who was getting special help from a resource teacher in reading, when asked if there was anything he would like to change about it, explained,

> *I'd like to change some things about reading. If I could change something about reading it would be to make everyone smart.*

This boy went on to tell me about who the good readers were in his class and about how he wasn't a good reader and he found it "hard" and did not like doing it. He talked at great length about how he liked math and going fishing with his grandfather on his big boat. Could it be that the reading was disconnected from his prior knowledge and interests?

Despite the outcomes and expectations of the language arts curriculum, with its focus on reading different types of texts, these children did not seem to like reading. They did not engage with its texts. In order to play the reading game, children named particular activities such as reading tests, correcting reading worksheets, and practicing for the CRTs as *enjoyable, fun,* and *exciting.* They tried to camouflage their intimidations and fear about reading. They shared how they experienced satisfaction and pleasure at the thought of pleasing pedagogues and significant others in their lives. Leah's earlier articulation of how she felt about her mother's reaction to her success with reading

exemplifies this. Greg, too, talked about how happy his parents were when he did well in school.

As children talked, about reading they described experiences that revealed disengagements and indifference with reading activities. Greg, in relating the experience of reading to his peers [each day a different child would be asked to read aloud to the class], bluffed his way through the essence of what that experience was for him.

Reading is fun...I like reading this story out loud to the other kids when the teacher asks me to do it. The story is hard though. It's about the Eiffel Tower and I don't know where it is. The story has hard words in it and I don't like that. Sometimes when I'm reading out loud it takes me a long time to sound out the words. Then I don't want the other kids to know that I don't know the words.

The rules of the reading game were embedded in an invisible way within the game playing. As the conversation continued, so too did the act, playing the game. It was as if the voice was disembodied from the child.

Despite the curriculum's espoused interrelationship among the strands of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and other ways of representing, some children's experiences revealed challenges with talking about books they had read. Jessica, in comparing her experiences with print-based texts and visual representations, tried to explain how the creation and sharing of visual texts is different and easier to talk about than a book.

Usually like when you're painting a picture or something, you're thinking of family members. With reading, like when you're reading a really long book, like a

chapter book or something, you wouldn't be able to share that with your family

because it would take way too long, but like if it was just a story book or

something like the kindergartens read, that would be too short to read.

Jessica seemed to be saying that, when she was in control of the text and involved in creating the text, it was easier for her to talk about it. She also related the sharing of books as being more challenging than sharing a visual representation of meaning.

Matthew, like Jessica and Greg, seemed to be saying that he liked the action and movement characteristics of three dimensional texts. Like Melissa and Ben, he also liked the idea of having some control over his reading. The factors, that determined whether Matthew was successful in the world of Pokemon texts, were within his control and not controlled by adults. As well, the degree of Matthew's engagement with the text was determined by the evolving feedback and positive reinforcement that was inherent in the evolving Pokemons.

I like seeing all the Pokemons evolve. The better you play the faster it evolves.

Ahhhh...you know Charmanda... well...he evolves into this... I have the book in my

schoolbag. It's the Pokemon Kanto Handbook. And this one is Charmeleon. They

win points for every Pokemon and when they get it up to maybe 10 000, it evolves

[pointing enthusiastically to the Handbook]. *He evolves into him with a Thunder*

Stone. Thunder Stone is a special kind of stone that makes 'em evolve and there's

a little thunder lightening thing inside.

Children fiddled with pencils, feigned interest and moved through the motions of a puppet show at recess time, coloured shapes and images and fell in line for reading

activities. The listlessness and disengagements within the reading game were contagious as children went about their assigned tasks in lobotimized disengagements. Greg, gave his perception of why a lot of Grade Three children did not like reading. He made it clear that the reading of books was very different from the texts such as electronic games, movies, and television that he and his peers engaged with on a regular basis. He tried to explain through hand gestures the flatness of his experiences with reading moving his palms along a level plane as he said,

> *Reading is like this [moving his hands along a plane]. It's right flat. And we like action. Grade threes likes being active and moving around. Like we like it on the playground and in the gym. We like little characters going up the side of the page when we're reading and the little characters in our games.*

According to Greg, within the game metaphor, the uni-dimensional nature of reading was not as engaging for children as the two-dimensional and even multi-dimensional nature of other texts. Reading did not have the textured experiences that were engaging for these children. Within the experience of reading as a game, there was the common understanding, among the children, of reading as something that was disengaging but necessary for success. Reading did not engage them as players and actors, in a search for meaning, and a passion for learning.

Matthew also alluded to the nature of the texts in his discussion about his experiences with Pokemon books and games. In his explanation of why he felt Grade Three children would like those books, he referred to the visual and multi-dimensional nature of the books and characters.

I think Grade Three kids would enjoy those books because there's lots of colour and they're moving good. I like the movies better than the books because there's one part...they go out and get stuck in a pool or a pond or something like that. I like a lot of pictures and some words.

Matthew alluded to the texts that engaged him and his peers as being outside of the world of adults and the texts they were comfortable with. In his conversation, he pointed to his preference for talking with his friends about reading and positioned "moms and dads" as being out of touch with Pokemon games.

I find it more comfortable to talk to friends [than adults] about reading because they... ahhhh...moms and dads don't like Pokemon. My dad do but my mom don't. I'd say the class likes Pokemon. I'd say your dads know way more about Pokemons...about ...than moms...Mom says, "If you keep on playing Pokemon and you need some help, phone your dad."

It is worth noting that Matthew, who was a very good reader, played the reading game and clearly did not want the testing aspect of the reading game to interfere with his engagements with other texts. He did not like the idea of having CRTs for his Pokemon games or books. The purpose for CRTs, in Matthew's world, was to enable one to go on to the next grade.

Ahhhhh...no I don't want CRTs on my Pokemon books...because I don't know everything about Pokemon yet. [With respect to CRTs for reading] I feel...ahhhh...a bit happy about the reading CRTs [in a melancholy voice]. They're right easy. They make me nervous sometimes. Sometimes they're exciting

'cause, if you passes them, you go to Grade Four. If you don't you have to stay in Grade Three.

As Ben talked about his PS (Playstation), it was more than a suggestion for pedagogues. His conversation was filled with language that could only emerge in discussions about his experiences within his lifeworld. He explained the instructions for the games and explained the terms that were used in the context of playing the game, such as *timer, drifting, wheelie, catwalk, jump, rush, take down, kick, laps* and the suggestions which followed claimed a space for his prior knowledge and for connections between the experiences of his lifeworld and school.

They should have PS Weeks and hockey at recess. They should have Hat Days because I like wearing my favourite hat [points to his hat]. *It's a Ski-doo hat.*

While the curriculum espouses the merit of reading engagements that link the child's lifeworld with the world of texts and that help children find their voices, children's perceptions of their experiences with reading revealed different realities. Their conversations, the interviews, and the focus groups became a metaphorical lantern which helped to illuminate the essence of children's experiences with reading as disengagements and longings for engagement and participation. Matthew alludes to these disengagements as he describes how he feels about the particular books that would be more interesting for him and his friends.

I would really enjoy reading if we had books about the things that I enjoy. If we had Pokemon books, I wouldn't mind going to school all summer. I think if we had Pokemon books the other children would enjoy reading more, too.

At the end of his interview Matthew promised to bring in "all the other books" he had at home that he thought his friends would enjoy.

Jane talked about reading as connected just with books, for her. She explained that she did not have electronic games and she did not have the internet in her home. She connected the reading she did in books, with what was relevant in her own world.

I think of books when I think of reading. When I'm reading about animals I usually think of my dog and if I'm reading about electricity, I think of the power in my own house, the power that I use.

Jane did not talk about her reading experiences as particularly meaningful or engaging but she did try to connect it to something meaningful within her own world and it was obvious that she was finding meaning in that way.

For the children, playing the reading game was a way of coping with disengagements. Their perceptions of their reading experiences identified reading as routine, as following the rules to stay in the game, as words, as books, as flat and one-dimensional, and, as solitary and alone. Their gestures and descriptions revealed passionless, lobotomized reading experiences without physicality. The magic and passion and the search for meaning was missing from their experiences but there was loyalty to playing the game.

Untapped Knowledge

As the study moved to the individual interviews and focus groups, the children switched from apprehension to excitement and enthusiasm, as they temporarily escaped the bonds of the reading journey, to release their untapped knowledge. Their eagerness to

share was manifested in their overt interest, confidence, and trust in the purpose of the study and their invitations to me, as researcher, to their lived world of reading experiences, including their electronic games, their MSN encounters, and their websites. Many children sought me out and asked for the initial interview experience and then to be interviewed a second time. They embraced the notion of a one-on-one encounter where attention was dedicated to understanding their experiences with reading. As co-researchers in this journey, the children reached a comfort level and were ready to unveil their knowledge and their perspectives to tell the world about how they were experiencing reading.

Undoubtedly, there were other benefits to *"going out for interviews"* beyond the sharing of reading experiences for some children, especially for those who had a pronounced disinterest in school, generally. For example, some children let me know during the second interview that they enjoyed meeting with me because they could get away from the classroom. Many of the children in this class used every opportunity to *"leave the room," "to use the bathroom,"* or *"to help in the lunchroom."* Like Greg, they seemed to want to escape the in-school spaces that were largely incompatible with the way they operated in their lifeworlds outside school. Part of that escape involved getting away through a legitimized process, which presented itself through the interviewing. This was intimated through comments from both Ben and Greg, who viewed one of the benefits of interviewing as being, *"a break away from the classroom"* or *" really cool... because you takes us out in the middle of the class. "* Donny's comments also alluded to a desire to be away from school. He complained openly that his class should have *"Friday*

off because another school had a day off." It is noteworthy that, in their lists of favourite

things to do, none of the children listed school or any in-school activities as their

favourite ones. This included reading. A common dislike for school generally and reading

specifically emerged throughout the study.

While some children admitted to the interview being an opportunity, for them, to

"leave the room," in the context of the interviewing, they discovered an opportunity to

reveal their untapped perspectives, to express their opinions and to engage in

conversations about how they experienced reading, and their engagements with a range of

texts, including books. Greg, in expressing how he felt about the interview, alluded to

how it gave him a sense of control over decisions. As his body language took on a stance

of confidence, he talked about how he felt with being able to participate in the interviews

and focus group.

> *I like it* [being interviewed] *because in an interview you get to have a say on what*
>
> *you do. In an interview I feel like I'm the government. You get to say...it's like a*
>
> *vote.*

He continued to provide a rationale for the importance he attached to *"having a*

say" as he elaborated on how he felt about his likes and dislikes regarding particular

books.

> *Sometimes in class last year I used to say that I wish we had a say on reading*
>
> *because the books we were reading were just plain, you know, novel books, and if*
>
> *you could have a say on reading, then teachers would know...but like it used to be*
>
> *boring and I think it was because this book that we had to read, they were more*

adulty books...like adults would read it. Like I like books about the animal

kingdom and how to try to save the animals.

Even though Greg made a quick admission to not liking certain in-school books,

distancing his comments, by referring to last year, made it more comfortable for him to

voice his opinion. He struggled with trying to articulate his reason for not liking certain

books. However, his reference to *"adulty books"* represented a shared sentiment which

was expressed by other children who felt that Grade Three children should have

opportunities *"to choose"* their reading materials and to *"have a say."*

The unveiling of children's voices and ultimately their perceptions of their reading

experiences came during the later phases of the study as the reticence and evasiveness of

the first interviews gave way to requests for more interviews and eventually to free

flowing conversation and discussion during the second interview and subsequent focus

groups. Through the children's voices, I began to hear about how they viewed their role

as students and readers and how they played the reading game. Conversation about

reading experiences was more uninhibited and flowed more easily and enthusiastically,

after the children realized that I was not linked to the provincial accountability regime and

that of the school.

Jane, who often tried to say what she thought was the accepted thing to say,

unveiled her voice, during the second interview, as she talked about children reading and

having choice. Her statement was clear about the notion of the need for individual voices

to be heard and about the difference between the likes and dislikes of grown-ups and

children.

The children should have a say because if grown-ups pick it they're going to be

like so (inaudible) *and they're not gonna really like it and grown-ups don't know*

what you like because, you know, you're not me and I'm not you, you're yourself

or I'm myself and like they don't know what you like...One minute they might say

...we're gonna go to the store and get somethin for you and you might say

somethin' and when they read they're gonna say, "I don't want that book, I wants

to pick out my own book"...like that.

Jane's words *"grown-ups don't know what you like"* seemed to validate the need

for children to have a say on matters that involve them. Other children, not only believed

that children should have a say, but also, offered their particular insights through specific

suggestions for teachers and schools. One suggested, *"I think they should have some new*

books in the library." Another, in giving advice for new teachers, said, *"Let them know*

that grade threes like scary books." While another said, *"They need to know that we like*

action."

Giving children a chance to choose and to be a participant in decisions about

reading was very important for the children in this study. Through language, gestures, and

pictures, children's insights about their reading experiences were illuminated as they

talked about the *"invisible person"* who corrected the CRTs, the parents and teachers that

they needed to please, the friends they needed to impress, the worksheets they needed to

complete, the attitudes about reading that they needed to portray, the skills they needed to

possess, the obstacles to reading that they needed to overcome, and the "reading game"

they needed to play. Children's articulation of their insights illuminated a depth of

understanding of what reading is for them as well as what they thought it should be and the implications for pedagogy.

Children talked of ways that reading could be improved and how things could be better for reading and they gave voice to the changes which they felt would improve their reading experiences. Matthew, a very quiet boy and a capable reader, had a lot to say about how reading could be improved and what he thought reading should be like at school. He went to great lengths to tell about what he saw as some of his concerns about reading in school. His speech was laboured at first and later became stronger as he realized that he could use his voice and share his perceptions of reading. He began with some advice for new teachers.

> *If I was the teacher...I would change...like if people were reading the book over and over and then I would say they can read Pokemon, Yu Gi Oh and any kind of a book they want except the books over and over again. I like super Mario Brothers too. I would say that they should pick really different books for grade threes. Like Pokemon, and Yu Gi Oh and some kind of books that we don't know of yet. Like different books we don't know of in the U.S....aah...and like times equations like that.*

Matthew moved outside the boundaries of classrooms and countries as he enthusiastically shared his ideas for countries to participate in the process of developing plans for children's reading journey.

> *Canada might come up with some interesting books in the future that would be good for grade threes. Probably Canada can make different kinds of movies and*

then come out with books for the movies. Then it is all connected with the movies. You might not know what's going on if it's like Pikachu. He's a kind of Pokemon. He's about two foot and he moves and does a lot more. Grade threes like Pokemon books because there are Pokemon that we don't know of yet. They might come out with more new Pokemon. [Matthew liked the idea of a series of Pokemon.] *I like it because if there's only one Pokemon you don't have anybody to battle.*

[He said he would also like a cartoon book like the Pokemon book, with Pikachu as the main character. He told about the kind of story he would like.]

I would like a book with smaller pages. If it's a really long story it takes you a long time to read it. I like the speech balloons in the comic books but I don't like them [pointing to the yellow inserts in the corner of each scene in an Asterix book].

Then, in his enthusiasm, he moved back to his own world and the world of the classroom and his role within the context of the reading journey.

If I wrote a book about Pikachu it would be about a Trainer, me, and I would own him and he would be in battles and all that. After the battles I would get friends for him...for Pokemon. would be good advice for new teachers. When Pokemon moves on they can grow more levels and they get stronger. When it comes to the end like here, [He points to his Handbook, to the last page.] *I would put down here, "...to be continued." The children would like that because they would think about movies and some kind of movies they like...that's to be continued. I like*

movies better than books because sometimes there are not colourful pictures in

the books but there's always...ahhh...sometimes there's colourful pictures in

movies.

Some of Matthew's comments revealed the idea of liking to be in control and being able to say no to things he did not want to do. On a scale of one to five, Matthew hesitated and then gave school a three. He said he wouldn't give it a five because he would be anxious to get home and play his Nintendo game. He liked staying home because he could get to play with his Nintendo. He went on to say that he would give school an eight if he could have his Nintendo and Pokemon books and games in class and he would be willing to go to school all summer long.

For Matthew, there was a spatiality issue with reading. His favourite space for reading was in his living room at his home because when his parents were doing something really important it was really quiet in his house. He claimed that he liked quiet and comfortable places for reading. Despite a number of interruptions that happened during the interview, Matthew seemed to be oblivious to them as he participated in the interview. It seemed as though he had entered his own world. A sense of joy and excitement was evident on his face. We had moved into his space.

Some children were not as receptive to vocalizing their perceptions, as Matthew was. However, for these children, mediating their voices was agreeable to their ways of communicating. One child's voice was mediated through a dramatic encounter with her Webkinz as she entered into a play space. The pretense and the creativity of the

experience helped remove her fear and intimidation about her perceptions of her reading experiences. She looked intently at her Webkinz and asked,

So, how do you feel about reading?

The Webkinz whispered the response in the eight-year old's ear and the child took on a different persona as she felt ready to share her thoughts, about how she experienced reading.

My Webkinz says he hates reading. He said he doesn't like the hard words and the books have hard words in them.

Another child created a drawing of himself and his friend and using speech balloons for each of them he uttered what was unspeakable through talk. The drawing revealed his attitude toward reading as in the speech balloon assigned to himself he writes, "*I don't like reading.*" Then he continues and hurriedly, as if he were afraid he would have a second thought and change his mind about what he wanted to say about reading, assigns a speech balloon to his friend. Within his friend's speech balloon he writes, "*I don't either.*" A sigh of relief came over him as he looked over his shoulder as if to say, "Nobody heard me and I have told my secret."

During phase one of the study, children were invited to participate in whole-class activities. As they wrote about their top five favourite things to do, I was able to move into their spaces and their lifeworlds in a non-obtrusive way. The children's writing about the things they enjoyed doing most at school and at home revealed another layer of meaning. They wrote about and drew pictures of their favourite activities where computers, electronic games, hockey, wrestling and movies were out in front and reading

books trailed far behind. Later, writing acrostic poetry, children revealed another layer of meaning and the collage another, each layer increasingly clarifying the meaning of children's experiences with reading. It was like the "matryoshka principle", removing the outer doll to reveal the next doll and the next and finally to the inner core where the essence of the matryoshka lies concealed in the final doll. Within each activity there was a layer of meaning which brought me ever more closer to the essence of what reading was for these children.

Children spoke easily about their lack of interest in the kind of reading they experienced at school and how their preferred space for reading was in their homes. The home offered for most of these children that special secret space. A very silent Jessica talked about how she did not like reading in school because it was noisy and the reading periods were not very long. She talked about her favourite place for reading as being on her back deck at home where she could read and hide away in a secret place and her reading would not be disturbed,

> *You see I sneak out on the deck and I close the gate. The canopy is over it and no*
>
> *one can see me. That's my favourite space for reading in the whole world.*

The 'secret place' has an essential role in the life of every child. Does the favourite reading space have some of the characteristics of a secret place that is so essential for the child? Leah, in describing her favourite place for reading, alluded to a quiet place where she could be alone. Her chuckle helped to reveal the essence of what that reading experience meant for her.

My favourite place for reading books is in my comfy green chair in my home when

there's nobody around. I sit there and read and my cat sits on my lap.

These layers of meaning illuminated the essence of children's reading experience to uncover a passionless experience, disconnected from children's interests, their lifeworlds, their contexts and the spaces they have secured as niches. Within these conclavities, children navigate beneath the surface and avoid direct contact with the reading expectations of schools and society. They move around at will, propelled by a limitless quest for meaning, an insatiable desire to communicate and interact with their peers, the occupants of this space. For within these spaces they have learned what counts as they 'read' in a new key of digital and multimodal texts in tune with only those who traverse there. Within these spaces, children are at the helm where the texts of childhood cultures become the bellwethers guiding the reading journey. As Jessica put it,

My friend and I don't like reading books but we read all the time on MSN

because that's how we talk to each other when we're outside of school. We have

our own websites and we read there too.

As I listened to Jessica, I was reminded of Braunger and Lewis's (2006) claim that, "Children learning to read...need adults who support them to be on the same page: understanding that reading is a construction of meaning"(p. 146). Some children wanted to continue this sharing of their perspectives as they invited me into their lived experiences and their lifeworlds through their personal web pages, their MSN encounters, their e-mails, their requests for *"another interview"* and through their invitations for me to "accompany them on field trips" or their volunteering "to come to the university to talk

with pre-service teachers." It was as though, in discovering their voices, they had found strength and empowerment in the realization that they had something of value to say. The emergence of their voices helped to create a comfort level and a willingness with bringing an adult into their "secret"spaces - their webpages, their electronic games, the ethos of the classroom, and their perceptions of their reading experiences- that were ordinarily reserved for children.

Summary

Through this phenomenological study, children's perceptions invited the researcher into their lived experiences with reading, where the essence of what reading was for them could be illuminated. As co-researchers, the children led the reading journey through themes of: reading as a disengaged, passionless, process; keeping in step and playing the reading game; and, finding empowerment in sharing their untapped perspectives and knowledge about their lived reading experiences. Children, as co-researchers, emerged as untapped resources, with much to share about their reading experiences. Their perceptions of their experiences, supported the search for the best and clearest representations of the essence of children's reading experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections

Introduction

This chapter brings my research journey to a close. It ends, not with solutions, but with a call for reflections on the themes that emerged from children's shared perceptions of their reading experiences. Through phenomenological writing this chapter invites the reader to dwell in an interpretive reflective space, for, as Greene (1995) suggests, "The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known"(p.15). In a similar vein Manen (2005) claims that "no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge"(p.7). This study represents an attentiveness to the lived experiences of a group of children and, in an interpretive reflective space, to possible explications of those experiences.

In preparation for this journey with children, I needed to examine and bracket my own experiences. Although my prior experience with children and reading was extensive, the bracketing helped bring some clarification to these experiences. It enabled me to see them in a new way as I became more aware of and confronted my personal biases and assumptions. Acknowledging my biases and assumptions and holding them in abeyance, helped me to orient myself to the phenomenon being explored and, ultimately, to see more clearly the meaning and essences of children's reading experiences. As I returned to the bracketing experience in the hermeneutic circle, the transcribing, the reading and rereading, and the writing and rewriting, it helped me to maintain a focus on the research

question. Finally, it challenged me to listen to my emotional reactions and to find significance in an experience I shared with these children.

Through children's words, their reading experiences are illuminated within themes of: reading as a disengaged process, playing along with the reading game, and untapped knowledge. New insights into the essence of their reading experiences emerge and are animated through their stories embedded in the themes. In revisiting the journey, this chapter shares reflections on the methodology used to guide the inquiry and the themes that emerged from the shared experiences. The reflections summon the reader to approach the unveiling of reading as a tribute to the voices of children.

Reflections on Methodology

This section shares reflections on the methodology used to explore children's experiences with reading. My research question was a phenomenological one, which was seeking to derive meaning from the shared phenomena of children's lived experiences with reading. Phenomenological methodology, as a mode of inquiry, balances description with analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday lived experiences (van Manen,1997). This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of children's lived experiences with reading by providing a space for them to be heard. Because of the key role that reading plays in primary children's learning and because of ongoing concerns about reading, it became a natural site for exploring children's experiences with reading.

My reflection on my own experiences helped me to prepare for my journey with children into their lifeworlds. It also helped me to remain oriented to the research

question in an exploration of children's lived experiences with reading and in doing so to unveil the essence of what reading was for them. While my experience with primary education and working with young children was extensive, writing and rewriting, to arrive at the essence of children's reading experiences, was challenging and at times emotionally overpowering as the meaning seemed to be just beyond language. At times, I seemed to be looking through the text of my life through the text of their lives. In the hermeneutic act, I returned to my interpretations over and over to peel away the layers that kept the essence just out of reach. Remaining oriented and focused on my research question in the quest for the essence of reading while maintaining an awareness of my own assumptions and biases was extremely challenging. It was like going into and coming out of darkness. Even though I knew where I was heading, I was groping for clarity and accuracy as I strived to give voice to the children's experiences.

The children's reading experiences presented as a kind of contagious malaise and disengagement with reading which infected the classroom ethos. It was reminiscent of my own childhood experiences in school. A flashback image of monotonous rows of children lining up to read and changing positions in the row, based on words missed, intersected with the reading experiences of these children. Melissa explained her reluctance with certain reading activities, saying, *I don't want to do it...because what if I get it wrong. What will happen then?* While Donny tried to hold onto his dignity as he defensively and tentatively explained that he liked math but he didn't like reading and, *If I could change something about reading it would be that everyone would be smart.*

While the activities, of the observation Phases One and Two, were designed as an initial foray into the lived world of these children and as a means for developing rapport, it revealed a layer of meaning that could not be ignored. It prepared the way for easing into the initial interviews. During the observation phases, some of the children's interests, likes, and dislikes emerged to reveal commonalities and insights. Three separate activities invited children to list: their top five favourite things to do, their top five favourite things to do at school, and their top five favourite things to do at home. The children's overall favourite activities emerged as some form of play, ranging from playing with pets, video games, WebKinz, Cabbage Patch dolls, Game Boy, Game Cube, Nintendo Wii, Nintendo DS Lite, and Hershey's Track and Field, to activities such as drawing, swimming, singing, playing basketball, wrestling, playing hockey, and soccer. They enjoyed using computers, MSN, and the IPOD Nano, as well as watching television and movies. None of the children included reading of print texts in their three lists of favourite activities.

During the interviewing, when reference was made to the absence of reading from their lists of favourite activities, children showed some uneasiness. It was as if they had suddenly realized that they had unveiled their perceptions in letting someone know that reading was not a favourite activity. They temporarily forgot to play along with the reading game as they became preoccupied with the activity of listing their favourite activities. It became obvious that they did not want adults to know that reading wasn't one of their favourite things to do. Ben was very uncomfortable with the idea of someone discovering that he didn't list reading but he was strong in his resolve to get himself back into playing along with the reading game. He tried to justify his decisions.

I didn't pick reading for one of my favourite things to do because I thought I had to pick just my top five favourite things. But...ah...ah...you know...if I had to pick my six favourite things..well.. I might have picked reading for number six.

Throughout the four phases of data gathering the different methods - observation, interviews, and focus groups - helped to reveal layers of meaning about children's reading experiences. It enabled a triangulation of data collection which helped open up spaces for understanding and interpreting the experiences that children shared. Each phase and each method moved the interpretation closer to the essence of what reading was for these children. van Manen (1997) explains that, phenomonological research requires the researcher to stand in the fullness of life, in the midst of living relations and shared situations and to actively explore the category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects (p. 32).

The many information-gathering sources facilitated the identification and validation of themes as well as the illumination of children's lived experiences. The process of identifying the commonalities and eventually uncovering themes was marked by writing and rewriting. As a poetizing project, phenomenological writing speaks in a more primal sense to involve the voice in an original singing of the world (van Manen, 1997) as the writer moves into a "writerly" (van Manen, 2005) space that the words open up. As we enter the world of the text where one develops a reflective relation with language, the taken-for-grantedness is disturbed. Wonder is the central phenomenological feature of phenomenological inquiry. The writer at best gains an occasional glimpse of the meaning of the lived experience. van Manen (2005) claims the

demands of this type of writing is the main heuristic challenge of phenomenological inquiry. In it, the writer dwells alone as she enters and traverses the space of the text, and of darkness.

Some children, whose reticence silenced their voices during the first interview, found empowerment as I invited them to speak through the voices of their Webkinz, their Cabbage Patch dolls, their art and writing. The fear and intimidation of expressing what they truly felt about reading diminished as the toys or the art that were so much a part of their lifeworld became the focus and hence the mediator for their voices. They used their politically, socially, and culturally tacit knowledge to present their perceptions of reading.

Choosing to select a group of children from a Grade Three class in a rural school worked very well for this study. Each had their unique things that named them as individuals but they also shared commonalities. They were all, in their own ways, able to articulate their experiences with reading. While there were common elements, there were also differences in how they experienced reading. Reflecting on my experiences with this group of children brings me back to myself as educator and pedagogue who had spent a number of years with children within van Manen's (1997) existentials of temporality, spatiality, corporeality, and relationality. I feel privileged to be in a position as researcher to explore the nature and essence of children's reading experiences by helping them to access and share their own thoughts through observation and engagements in interviews.

I reflect on the fragility of the children's voices and the ambivalence inherent in their stance as they initially struggle to hide behind the interviews, and then later to disclose their reading experiences. Their insights emerge as they become preoccupied

with portraying, through writing and art, their feelings about the things they enjoy doing, the games they like to play, and the texts they engage with. They maintained such a strong focus and sense of flow on the process of the art and writing activities during the first phase of the study that it helped them to loosen some of the chains of control to reveal what they wanted to share. It also made it easy for them to move into a rapport with me. Their art and writing renditions opened doors into their insights which gave me something to build on in the interviews. I hoped that my interpretation of what I heard would do justice to the perspectives of these children and their lived experiences.

The flexibility that is central to phenomenological methodology worked well for this group of eight-and nine-year-old children. This kind of flexibility is necessary. It enabled me to work within the parameters and the space of the school at a time in the year when school schedules were challenged to respond to the requirements of provincial testing programs, and other end of year activities. For example, I had initially planned to conduct the interviews in a place away from other people but found that on certain occasions this was not possible so I had to use other spaces. As well, for some children who were reticent about talking but wanted to participate, I used particular techniques for mediating their voices. This wasn't anticipated before beginning the study.

The teachers in this school were very welcoming and this enabled me to continue the participant observer role on field trips and hikes, and during assemblies, physical education classes, and music classes. Being a participant observer in these activities. helped me to experience and get to know the child in different domains of learning. The children used these opportunities to share their experiences from within their lifeworlds

and inadvertently supported my commitment to van Manen's (1997) "practical reflection in the concreteness and fullness of lived life" (p. 5).

The phenomenological methodology with its focus on the appearance of things and a return to things as they are given, facilitated the emerging of the essences of the children's reading experiences through intuition and reflection on experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings. The descriptions retained the original texture of children's experiences and through a recursive and circular process become embodied in themes that help sustain the inquiry and my passionate involvement with and interest in children.

Reflections on the Themes

This section turns to a discussion of the themes identified within the context of the journey of inquiry and the literature reviewed for the study. The findings from this study offer new insight into children's reading experiences. Children's articulations of their reading experiences emerge through themes of: reading as a disengaged process, playing the reading game, and untapped knowledge.

Reading as a Disengaged Process

I was not surprised to find that children had lots to say about their reading experiences. They were keenly interested in talking about their in-school and out-of-school experiences. However, I was amazed at their profound sense of indifference and disengagement with reading, and with the social and cultural control that children were experiencing as a result of the focus on process and accountability. Children's reading experiences seemed to be tethered to the jargon and intent of government policies and

accountability regimes. This condition held at ransom, children's potential for thinking and for meaning seeking in a reading process that presented itself as an activity for certain spaces, certain times, with certain people. Leah's preoccupation with accountability and the importance of reading for success in school alluded to this.

> *My mom said if you don't pass your reading CRTs it will stay in your file, and when you go to high school, the teachers will see it and they'll know that you're not a good reader.*

This automated process moved children along on a wave of test preparation as they practiced filling in bubble sheets, completed worksheets, prepared for tests, followed directions, worked with the resource teacher, obeyed orders, and endured the close scrutiny of reading records to move from one leveled book to another.

Greene (1995) claims that the imagination is the cognitive capacity that allows us to interrupt the taken-for-granted, to give credence to other realities. Engagement in creative activities, during the early phases of the study, enabled children to temporarily and spontaneously move away from established ideas about reading to unveil the hidden realities. It is noteworthy that only when the parameters of an activity required them to comment on reading did it surface within the context of their favourite activities and their lived experiences. Only when the reading activity was mediated by art, discussion, movies, and writing, did children appear interested and engaged. When they were engaged they began to instinctively unveil their perceptions and as they became subsumed within the purpose of the activities and forgot to pretend.

The only possibility for future escape from the routine of the reading journey was to be found in how well one adhered to the reading process and jumped through the hoops along the way to arrive at the finish line. For these children, it was a school and a societal thing to do. I reflect on the experience of Ben who stuttered along with reading aloud to his class in an attempt to stay with the reading journey, to keep with the process, to keep with the program. This experience was described in Chapter Four but bears repeating here. It illustrates the shared experience of disengagement with reading.

Reading is fun...I like reading this story out loud to the other kids when the teacher asks me to do it. The story is hard though. It's about the Eiffel Tower and I don't know where it is. The story has hard words in it and I don't like that. Sometimes when I'm reading out loud it takes me a long time to sound out the words. Then I don't want the other kids to know that I don't know the words.

Ben fell in line because that's what he was expected to do. This was part of the reading as a process, a disengaged process.

From time to time, during the course of the study, children's descriptions of their reading experiences revealed a brokenness and apathy that usurped their hope for any meaningful engagement with reading. van Manen's (2002) discussion about the demise of hope alludes to an absence of meaning and a process to be endured.

The language of outcomes, delivery, assessment, inputs, consumer satisfaction is a disembodied language of hope from which hope itself has been systematically purged. It is an impatient language that does not truly awaken. It is a language that

so chops up hope into such small bits that neither the king's horses nor the king's men will ever put it together again (p. 83).

This research journey illuminates the reading experiences of individual children in a pedagogy trapped within constructions of childhood where the theoretical, political, social, and cultural elements position children as subjects and play a significant role in defining them as readers. The disengagements that mark the children's reading experiences present as a kind of contagious malaise which hi-jacks the desire to read for meaning. It infects the reading experience and leaves it groping for energy and sustenance to recover from its lobotomized state.

While disengagement was common and embedded within the reading experiences for most of the children, Greg exhibited the strongest case of disengagement and indifference. He was consistently disengaged with any activities within the classroom that involved reading. Using excuses to escape the drudgeries of reading, Greg asked to leave the room, complained about various activities, feigned difficulties and challenges with reading experiences, and acted out the class clown to distract himself and others from the reading experience. Despite this obvious aversion to reading, he went to great lengths to expound on and extol the benefits and virtues of reading.

These children were positioned in and conveyed along the journey of reading by processes developed by adults and used to legitimate control over them. This domination of process through accountability regimes, and notions about reading for achievement, reading to pass, and reading to go to the next grade, contradicts definitions of reading for

purpose, reading for enjoyment, reading for meaning, reading for escape, reading to understand, and reading to learn.

Children's lived reading experiences severed any attachment to reading for meaning. It was a threatening experience, where they blushed when they were called upon to read aloud, or where they quietly mumbled about not liking to read to a whole class of children, or feigned interest in a book they were expected to read. For children who had learned what counts in reading and had acquired some of the skills of reading, their experiences of reading in school fitted into a surrealistic lifeworld puzzle overlaid with a hollowed pretense of bookbags filled with digital texts, schedules, tests, pencils, and mocking laughter at what was missing.

The magic and passion within the words of Emily Dickinson's poem seemed far removed from the lived experiences of reading, in the reading as a process journey, for these children.

> There is no frigate like a Book
>
> To take us Lands away
>
> Nor any Coursers like a Page
>
> Of prancing Poetry... (Langton, 1980, p.142).

Playing the Reading Game

As the children realized that their reading experiences are part of a compulsory, passionless, and disengaging journey which is traveled under the surveillance of school and accountability systems, they played along with the reading game by doing what they understood was expected of them. Greg illustrated this in his commentary about CDs.

books, reading, and being interviewed as he struggled, within the invisible controls, to play along with the reading game and the pretense of liking reading.

I don't really like the CD...ahhh... I like the books more. [During a period of listening to the CD of *Wind Over Dark Tickle*, Greg showed visible signs of enjoying the CD rendition, as he laughed and moved to the music.]

You know, a lot of children want to be interviewed cause they wanna tell you and tell other people in the world how fun reading is and like their choice is reading. Like some of the books...ahhh...the teacher has big cartons of them...and some of them are like too cartoonish, you don't want them, and some are just like too chapterish, and some are just like...great fun, but they're really hard to find. When you're talking about reading in class you can't really tell the truth because it's really fun and interesting and most people think it's right boring. When you're talking about that most people ain't listening to you and they're saying, "Yeah," and they're just saying that so that the teacher will be happy with them and I feels like I'm saying just the wrong thing. Chapter books, when they're too long, they're gonna get boring after awhile because it seems endless. When I talk to adults about reading, seems like there's a lot of pressure to say the right things and I gets nervous and stuff. I gets a funny feeling in my stomach. When I get nervous I gets right hot and I gets tired. I feel like a lot of pressure is on me. I don't know why but sometimes I do.

As Greg persisted with the reading game, he stick-handled his way around the challenging moves, as he talked about *not liking the books in the carton, how fun reading*

is, feeling nervous, and *feeling pressure to say the right thing*. While trying to stay with

the reading game, Greg sometimes faltered and slipped as he, tentatively, maneuvered his

way under the surveillance of CRTs and went on to talk about them as being *fun* and then

as being *really boring*. Greg seemed burdened under the control of needing to say the

right thing and needing to play the reading game.

With the meaning of, and purpose for, their reading activities connected to illusive

future goals and purposes that bear very little, if any, relevance to their daily lives,

children are compelled to look for strategies and coping mechanisms, within the reading

game, to enable them to journey on in the absence of real meaning and engagements. The

voices are pushed back. It's like a game and these children knew very well that they have

to either play along or lose the game. Losing the game had so many implications

including, living outside the set process of the teacher and peers, failing to move on, not

participating, becoming alienated from the reading curriculum, as Melissa tried to

explain,

> *I don't want to do it [the reading worksheet] and I'm not going to do it. I don't*
>
> *know how to do it. I'm not going to even try. I don't want to do it...because what if*
>
> *I get it wrong. What will happen then? Can I take it out with me when I go to the*
>
> *resource teacher?*

To cope with their experience of reading as a disengaging, passionless journey,

the children, in this study, played along with the reading game within conceptualizations

of literacy as largely traditional print-based and within curriculum and pedagogic

orientations that revealed a lack of understanding and dismissal of new media, and multi-

modal texts. For these children, conceptualizations of literacy as new and vibrant are reserved for spaces, beyond the school walls, where their encounters with MSN, text messaging, electronic games, cell phones, and e-mails keep them wired and connected for the world outside of school.

Because children have always been, and continue to be, positioned at the receiving end of policy, curriculum, and accountability developments, and have not participated in these developments, they do not benefit from input that comes from children in their own age group and connected in ways to their lifeworld. They are compelled to comply with decisions about reading curriculum and policy development, and choices of resources, that are controlled by adults in the absence of children's voices.

Subsequently, children's feelings of disenfranchisement from reading as a meaningful process and their school captivity compel them to seek coping mechanisms so they move into 'playing the reading game.' Despite the fact that researchers have espoused the important role of engagement in reading, and have linked engagement to motivation and children's desires to go to reading for altruistic, efferent, and aesthetic purposes, the children in this study were experiencing a relationship with accountability regimes, and patterns, processes, and routines.

As Donny followed the reading instructions to construct a paper folding activity, he mumbled under his breath his frustration with the practice of withholding information about the purpose and the final product. The realization that this was part of the reading game and he had to go along with it, with his metaphorical "blindfolders"on, agitated him.

I'm folding this now but if we don't have to do anything with it after it's finished and
this is wasting my time I'll be so mad [making a facial gesture that showed his
impatience and agitation with the reading activity]. Somebody's gonna know.

By sidestepping children's voices, society and education systems have routinely sidestepped potentially valuable sources of knowledge when it comes to reading. As recent as a decade ago, Mayall (1996), writing about curriculum developments in England, wrote that it, "...explicitly denies children's knowledge and experience as a determinant of the agenda" (p. 80). Outcomes-oriented trends on the world scene in literacy policy have used top-down approaches for the development process, inadvertently denying children the opportunity to participate with their knowledge and perspectives. The children in this study, were not aware of the names of these policies but were they ever aware of what they meant for them and their experiences with reading.

Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) examined factors that influence engagements with reading, claiming that beliefs, self-efficacy, interest, expectation, strategy use, and involvement affect children's engagement with reading. What would children say? As has been traditionally so, the children in this study had not been involved in reading policy and pedagogy developments.

My work with the children in my study, caused me to reflect on whether children are living outside of the literacy of praxis in schools. The texts and literacies that these children were engaging with– through new media and electronic texts– in their spaces outside the classroom, may be preparing them for the world of their future workplaces, but were largely resisted and unacknowledged in the literacy directions implemented

through provincial curriculum and accountability regimes. While teachers succumbed to the neoliberal directions of linear learning and testing structures of the education system, children reserved spaces for their engagements with their magazines, toys, and multi-modal and electronic texts designed outside of the education system. Guthrie and Wigfield's (1997) motivational factors were inherent in these texts as children were drawn to them like magnets on playgrounds, under tables, in classroom corners, in hallways, or on buses, away from the teaching and learning structures of the classroom.

Turner (1997) notes that, in terms of classroom contexts, open task environments focusing on student choice, control, challenge, and collaboration have been known to enhance the intrinsic motivation for literacy pursuits. What would children say? The children in this study huddled together in small and large groups whenever there was an opportunity to engage with their texts of choice. Within these contexts, affective and motivational factors can influence reading engagement and, as Wigfield (1997) argues, positive motivation can be maintained by children who have learning goals. What would children say? The goals for children in this study were centred around their text of choice. While as Cambourne (1988) contends, motivation and engagement are two different concepts, when children are motivated to want to read for authentic purposes and can make meaningful connections between reading and their own lives, their motivation to read becomes intrinsic (Braunger & Lewis, 2006). What would children say? Cambourne (1988) and Oldford-Matchim (1994) espouse a role for significant others such as parents and teachers, in reading engagements. They claim that the probability of engagement

increases if the demonstrations are given by someone with whom the learner has bonded. What would children say?

Untapped Knowledge

The privilege of keeping presence with these children allowed me to go where real teaching and learning resides, in children's thinking and experiences. The various activities that they had engaged in with me helped to make comprehensible some notions that might otherwise have eluded me. As one boy spontaneously drew a picture of himself with a speech balloon which carried the message, "*I hate reading*" and then another figure representing his friend and a speech balloon which carried the same message, his voice was validated and his knowledge tapped into. Using his imagination and feeling aligned with a creative sense, the boy was able to represent through art and images, what he couldn't do with print alone.

Jessica, in her conversational interview, was anxious to talk about reading, about favourite places to read, about the reading she would take with her when she drove to Alberta in the summer to visit her father, about her nervousness with CRTs. Today she had just finished one of her CRTs and her mother had told her that she would get an IPOD if she passed Grade Three. Intelligent, quiet, and shy Jessica was ready to unveil her voice as we moved into her space and her comfort zone with the things in her lifeworld.

> *I really enjoy the interview because I like talking about the things I do. Sometimes I talk to my friends and my cousin. She knows a lot about computers and she's in Grade Four. When something pops up on the computer she can get rid of it. Like*

the people who made the WebKinz world...they take control of it. If you want to

get in the clubhouse you have to show your parents. When you e-mail them you

can get into either one of the clubhouses. Most people in my class don't talk about

WebKinz. Most of them talk about Nintendo. I talk to my dad on MSN because

he's in Alberta. I like MSN because you can talk to people out in town and here.

I'd rather talk to my friends on MSN because when you talk to your friends in

class you can get in trouble. Sometimes reading CRTs are hard. Today we had to

read about a teacher. When I read the question, "What time does Mr. Mani get up

in the morning?" I couldn't find it but then I looked at the clock and it said 6

o'clock. Some books I like and some books I dislike. I have a website and I write

the things I like and the things I dislike on my website.

Jessica's description revealed two different realities– the reality of the school and

that of her own lifeworld. Her personal goals were tethered to her electronic games,

MSN, and the computer. It was through these that she could keep in touch with her father,

could voice her opinions, and carry on private conversations with her friends and family.

Her website carried a shout page where she could say what she liked and what she didn't

like, in safety. The classroom kept these texts out of reach for Jessica. So she longed for

school "*to be over*"so she could move into her spaces.

Throughout the study, the conversations, the interviews, and the focus groups

became the metaphorical lantern of Diogenes (van Manen,1997) which helped to

illuminate the essence of children's experiences with reading within the school a space

where they experienced it as disengagements and longings for engagement and

participation. It also validated the need for children's voices to be heard on matters that involved them.

During the early phase of the study, children treated me as a guest that they wanted to impress. Sometimes they would engage in particular behaviours for the sole purpose of making everyone laugh. At other times they were particularly interested in showing me their electronic games, their wrestling toys, their puppets, their cell phones, and magazines. Interacting with them during their recess and lunch breaks proved to be an important part of journeying with them as I was invited in to some of their metaphorical spaces between home and school. It created a seamless journey from class time to break time and it helped the children to understand that I was interested in their experiences with texts that they did not use during class time. I expressed interest in learning to use some of their games.

These experiences helped them to feel comfortable with me and to develop a sense of trust as they began to realize that I was outside the boundaries of the provincial accountability regime of testing and that of the school. I made it clear to the children that they did not have to prove anything to me. I was not here to evaluate their performance but I was interested in their reading experiences. With evaluation out of the way, it made it easier for them to share their perspectives and to share their perceptions of their reading experiences.

In their talk about their various reading experiences, I sensed that they felt empowered, elevated, and honored that an adult and an "outsider" would want to keep presence with them, and to hear about their perceptions of their lived experiences with

reading. I became the bridge between the different realities, their different worlds, the out-of-school and the in-school worlds. Through me, their voices could be unveiled and as they reflected on their reading experiences the world of the classroom was juxtaposed against their lifeworlds. They eagerly described what reading was like from their perspectives as they talked about the nature of Grade Three children, the reading process, a range of texts, in-school and out-of-school reading, comfortable and not-so-comfortable places to read, and their lack of involvement in decisions about reading, books, and other texts.

Ben was eager to volunteer himself to come to the university to tell them [people studying to be teachers] about Grade Three children and reading, about what Grade Three children like to do, and about what they, as new teachers, needed to know.

Grade threes likes action. They need to know that. I don't mind coming to the university if you want me to. I'll even ask my mom if I can go to the university to tell them about what we like to do. They should have a PS10, you know.

Ben wasn't being controlling or proud in these comments. However, I had a strong sense that he was being forthright in his desire to communicate with people who were studying to be teachers because he thought he could help. He seemed to understand that the two worlds– of teachers and Grade Three children– were separate and they needed to intersect. In his eagerness to help both worlds to understand each other, Ben was able to put aside the reading game, and to momentarily forget about his intimidations and hesitancies, as he offered his insights and input into processes that he had not been involved with before.

Jane understood a lot about individuality and this understanding emerged as she expressed her thoughts about the difference between adults and children and the need for children to be able to choose some of their own books. She revealed her rationale for her stance.

> *The children should have a say because if grown-ups pick it they're going to be like so (inaudible) and they're not gonna really like it and grown-ups don't know what you like because you know you're not me and I'm not you, you're yourself or I'm myself and like they don't know what you like...One minute they might say ...we're gonna go to the store and get somethin' for you and you might say somethin' and when they read they're gonna say, "I don't want that book. I wants to pick out my own book"...like that.*

Children find their voices within the existentials of spatiality, corporeality, temporalty, and relationality. The children's articulation of their experiences breaks apart pedagogical notions of child-centred curriculum, learning styles, individualization, multiple intelligences, progressive education, new literacies, multiliteracies, whole language, meaning seeking experiences, and the expanded definition of texts. Here with these children and their experiences, the journey and the search come together, for new presentations to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable, where the artist or writer works without rules, to create "allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented," so we can witness the unpresentable; activate the differences and save the honor of the name (Lyotard,1984, pp. 81-82) through uncovering the essence of children's experiences with reading.

During Phases Three and Four of the study, children were strong in their commitment to their untapped knowledge about reading and the nature of Grade Three children, as they guided the inquiry into the spaces of their engagements. They freely offered to share their previously untapped knowledge with pre-service teachers at the university, to make suggestions for improving reading for Grade Three children, and to talk about the nature of their relationships with a range of texts. In unveiling their voices and their untapped knowledge, they presented reading for today's children, as a complex, multidimensional act that includes traditional print reading skills and skills for accessing meaning from digital and multi-dimensional texts. It did not matter anymore about lisping or stuttering or not being able to read very well. As together we moved into their reading spaces, with their texts, the children's experience of reading presented as sources of untapped knowledge. Matthew found comfort within those spaces and, despite his reticence and stuttering, made a clear statement about reading and testing.

> *Ahhhhh...no, I don't want CRTs on my Pokemon books...because I don't know*
> *everything about Pokemon yet.* [With respect to CRTs for reading] *I feel...*
> *ahhhh...a bit happy about the reading CRTs* [in a melancholy voice]. *They're*
> *right easy. They make me nervous sometimes, though. Sometimes they're exciting*
> *cause if you passes them you go to Grade Four. If you don't you have to stay in*
> *Grade Three.*

The profound wisdom in Matthew's statement , *"because I don't know everything about Pokemon yet,"* reveals a tacit understanding, on his part, of deficit models that search for what children don't know. Matthew was uncomfortable with this and he did

not want it to interfere with his relationship with his Pokemon texts, which included books, games, and toys. Even though Matthew could read very well, he preferred home over school because, as he said,

> *When I'm home I can read about Pokemon and I can play my games. When my Mom and Dad are in another room it's really quiet in the living room and that's where I like to read and play my games.*

Matthew understood very well that he *"didn't know everything yet"* and that the texts that he engaged with, outside of school, respected that. Feedback, with his electronic texts, was fast and consistent. In his relationship with Pokemon, confirmation of his success came with the evolution of new and exciting Pokemon characters, and he was in control of the journey, the strategies, and his success. Reading in school, for him, seemed to be more about a compulsory journey, over which he had very little control. He explained that he interpreted his role, in the reading game, as being that of *"a worker."* The journey was more about finding out how much he didn't know as opposed to reading for meaning, for an aesthetic experience, for escape, for fun, or for developing a relationship with a text. Sometimes Matthew brought his literacy tools to school but he engaged with them during recess and lunch periods and on the playground. Sometimes, as he admitted, he stayed home because he could *"play with his Pokemon"* and read the books he *"wanted to read"* in the *"quiet of* [his] *living room."*

Summary

Finally, we arrive at the essence of what reading is for a group of children who are challenged to manage reading within the ethos of a classroom under the surveillance of

accountability systems. Children recognize who they are as readers, understand the nature and goals of reading particular texts and find reading engagements in MSN encounters and childhood spaces where theory and practice come together. As children talk about their reading experiences within spaces reserved for each other, where they read for personal purposes and enjoyment, they appreciate the opportunity to unveil their voices and sidestep constructions of childhood that position them as subjects. Here in their MSN encounters and their engagements with a range of out-of-school texts, they take back the power to release their voices.

CHAPTER SIX

Summary, Introspection, and Implications

Summary

In this section, I return to the reason I began this work, which was to launch an inquiry into the lifeworlds of children in order to explore and reflect on their lived experiences with reading. This study enabled me to move into a shared space with children where reading presented as a disengaged, passionless process. As the study progressed, children's descriptions revealed a deeper insight into how they are experiencing reading.

The children's perceptions of their experiences presented a collage of articulations and insights, in releasing their untapped knowledge and perspectives. It was like the "matryoshka principle," removing the outer doll to reveal the next doll and the next and finally to the inner core where the essence of the matryoshka lies concealed in the final doll. Within each experience, each activity, each representation, each expression, there was a layer of meaning which brought me ever more closer to the essence of what reading was for these children.

The journey of inquiry moved from reading as disengagement and indifference to a coping mechanism found in the game metaphor. Children's descriptions illuminated the reading experience and the coping took place within the context of game playing where children intuitively knew the rules of the reading game and played along. It brought back flashbacks of childhood experiences of pretense and playing along in order to cope with disengagements and indifference. Engagement was found in the constructing of paper

boats and lining them up along the desk where the pencils would normally be. When the teacher removed them from the desk the child found her voice in diary writing. Within this shared space, children's school identities and out-of-school identities were tied to particular texts. It was only when I was with the knowing in this shared space with children that I began to understand how they were experiencing reading.

As the children in this study seem to move in harmony with the goals and new literacies outside of school, some aspects of school– rows of desks; teacher in control under the surveillance of accountability systems and society; attachments to print; homework; graded systems; canonic content; adherence to an agricultural calendar; separation of school and home; and children, as subjects, at the bottom of top-down orientations– remain tethered to industrial societies of a century ago.

While the lifeworlds of children are full of engagements with information knowledge, new technologies, and a range of texts and tools for reading, writing, and speaking, they are finding themselves locked into frameworks, in schools, that do not engage them or connect with the world they thrive in out of school. Through their articulations of their reading experiences, the children, in this study, gave voice to these realities.

Their engagements with texts, beyond books, were largely reserved for their out-of-school spaces. The out-of-school identity that emerged was of untethered freedom. The children were readers and viewers of multi-dimensional and multi-modal texts. Their engagements were with electronic games, Video, CDs, IPODs, cell phones, and television. Finally, empowerment came as they found their voices through text

messaging, MSN, websites, shout pages, and e-mails. Their childhood culture was acknowledged through engagements with Pokemon, Nintendo Dogs, WebKinz, wrestling matches, and internet surfing.

The in-school and out-of-school reading identities are separated by a gorge that children traverse as they move in and out of these, on a daily basis. Within the context of the pre-determined reading journey in school, children described themselves as workers and the teacher as boss. They talked about doing homework, following orders, filling in worksheets, being on time, following a schedule, reading prescribed books, standing in front of the class to read, worried about reading, nervous about failing, and preparing for high school. This presented as loss and emptiness, as indifference, as yearnings for freedom and engagements with relevant texts, as longing for a voice and control. Within this meaningless process the reading game became a coping mechanism and an escape from the disengagements associated with reading. As Donny played along with the reading game he looked for validation as he moved into the shared space.

I don't like reading but I like math. Did you like reading when you went to school?

After children established their roles and found some control within the reading game, their untapped knowledge about reading and Grade Three children emerged. Within this shared space, I found myself reassured in my thinking that their experiences matter and they have the potential for contributing to, supplementing, and correcting, what we understand about children's reading experiences. Children's individual experiences become sites where they find their voices and the reading that schools have

inherited become a process of revival and rejuvenation, as children become strong in their resolve to share their knowledge from within their lifeworld.

Grade threes likes action. They need to know that. I'll even ask my mom if I can go to the university to tell them about what we like to do.

Introspection

While writing about children's experiences in Chapter Four, I found myself reflecting on one of Marc Chagall's images. In his rendering of *I and the Village*, his portrayal of experiences resonates with me as I return to it over and over again. The layers of meaning are illuminated within the fecundity of individual images and details and in the wholeness of life. Chagall invites and compels us to combine, separate, and overlap images and peel away the layers to reveal the essence of the experiences. Just as the layers of paint and images, and the balancing of light and darkness, and the viewer's lifeworld, come together, in a relationship with *I and the Village*, to lead the viewer into a reflection based on their own experiences, so too, do the pieces of children's experiences expressed here come together in a collage of meaning for the reader to experience and reflect upon.

As I drove away from the school parking lot in June, 2007, after spending more than five weeks with a class of Grade Three children, my thoughts and reflections swirled around as the children's experiences came together like some surrealistic image before me. The voices that were no longer present bounced back and echoed in my head. The echoes gave me a chance to reflect on and to reclaim that pedagogical relationship that I had experienced with the children through their experiences with reading. Their

experiences resonated with memories and reflections of my own childhood experiences of

reading and also with my professional experiences as a teacher and a curriculum

developer where children's voices and their out-of-school texts were absent from policy

and pedagogy in a taken-for-granted phenomenon.

The multi-dimensional Quidditch game played by Harry Potter seemed to be

absent from children's reading experiences. I couldn't help but reflect on what I had heard

from these children about the flatness of reading when on July 7, 2007, I perused Kate

Taylor's column in the Globe and Mail. In citing her rationale for children's profound

interest on a global scale in *Harry Potter* books she wrote, "Part of the charm of the

Harry Potter books is the way in which Rowling creates magical equivalents for iPods,

cellphones and Nike running shoes. Harry has a much-coveted Nimbus Two Thousand

broomstick; his school books feature moving images; and Quidditch, the sport that

Hogwarts pupils play on broomsticks, is like a three-dimensional version of a computer

game" (p. R7). Is this what Greg was trying to express when he was explaining how he

experienced reading as *flat*?

A month later as I sat at my computer, on a warm summer's day, reflecting on my

journey with the children and their perceptions of their lived experiences with reading and

what I had heard from those who participated in my study, I had a sudden impulse to go

to Chagall's painting, *I and the Village*. Here it is on the internet. My tacit knowledge

seemed to be leading me in the direction of Chagall's surrealistic image of peasants and

scythes, relationships and religious icons, embedded in the lived experiences of villages

and villagers, faces peering through windows magnified by the simple architecture of

houses and windows, women milking cows and mowing tools being carried on men's shoulders...back to my roots, to my childhood and on to my experiences with the children in my study. My journey had come full circle back to where I began, this time burdened with the weight of postmodern incredulities of grand narratives about pedagogy.

The surrealism of the journey with these children became apparent as I reflected on the joys, epiphanies, discoveries, and ambivalence that had brought me into and out of their lives. The moody silence of the eight-year girl who made a furtive attempt, as she cast a glance over her shoulder, to be interviewed once more revealed a longing to be heard, to be engaged with decisions about matters that involved her; the hug from the nine-year-old burly boy with his uncertain smile which said that you know my secrets about school and reading; and, the intensity with which two girls scrambled to write their web page addresses on their artwork to keep me in touch with their world outside of school, intertwined with the surrealistic images in Chagall's painting, *I and the Village*. Images superimposed and juxtaposed themselves and emerged in those children who wanted to be interviewed *just one more time*, in those who had the skills that would enable them to know and articulate what counts in reading, and of those who were fumbling for meaning, sometimes veiling and hiding their voices behind the bureaucratic accountability icons of standardized testing, correcting, filling in blanks, and shading in bubble sheets.

Through the perceptions of the children in this study, school, for them, had become a misfit, where conceptions of reading and literacy are out of harmony with the lifeworlds of children. Are schools, that maintain the ethos of century old industrial age

structures, in danger of becoming obsolete? Jessica, in rationalizing the fact that she did not tend to read much around the school, said,

We do like reading, you know. We read all the time on MSN.

Implications

One might argue that the reading experiences of a group of eight children cannot be generalized to reading and children. While this is so, the individual children's perceptions of how they are experiencing reading, compels us to face what Gadamer (1998) refers to as "the fecundity of the individual case"(p. 38). Phenomenology never generalizes and it "does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). Generalizations about children's reading experiences based on the lived experiences of Greg, Ben, Leah, Jessica, Donny, Jane, Matthew, and Melissa, would be troublesome because to do so would deny the fecundity and the value of the lived experiences and lifeworlds of other children. As van Manen (1997) points out, "The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience"(p. 22). Phenomenology provides another opportunity for us to hear another story and forces us to reflect on our own.

Most of the existing research addresses overarching conceptual issues on reading that appear to be driven by researchers and, in some cases, adherence to criteria for research funding. More studies are needed to give children voice on the subject of reading as well as on other aspects of literacy for primary children. Rather than engaging in more

theory validation, which has been commonplace, child-based inquiry is intended to be inductive and grounded in student data. With such inquiry, emphasis is given to sharing power with children in research by going directly to them and describing and examining children's meanings and interpretations of reading and pedagogy.

Reflecting on the wisdom which emerges through children's voices, I have a profound sense that, as researchers in the 21st century context of reading and new literacies, we have a moral obligation to go to children for their insights and include their perspectives along with adults' if we are to use reading research to inform practice. For, in the world of digital texts, children are participating in a particular childhood culture and lifeworld that can only be viewed through the lens of children's perceptions. There is a need for research that moves into their 'spaces' and their attendant reading activities, to elicit their perceptions about their reading experiences. There is an invitation, within the findings of this study, for educational researchers to examine children's reading experiences from within their spaces, their attendant reading activities, and their lifeworld, through their perceptions, their shared experiences, and their stories.

The themes emerging through this study, confirm for me, that, first of all, to be heard is probably one of the most essential human needs. Everyone has a personal story, a personal experience, a lived experience, that is unique to them and is important to be listened to in informing directions in education for the 21st century. Every child's voice deserves to be heard. Second, children deserve opportunities for engagements with texts that are motivating and relevant and in tune with their childhood cultures. Third, children's out-of-school texts need to be embraced in schools. Fourth, some aspects of

schools of today need to be reconsidered within the context of new technologies, new literacies, multiliteracies, and a knowledge- and information-based society. Fifth, children need challenges that engage them as learners and as creative and critical thinkers. Children need to be encouraged to share their voices and their perspectives about how they are experiencing the world and to have their voices heard, appreciated, and understood. The lens through which they view the world is uniquely theirs, in all of its fecundity. Through children's voices we learn about another perspective, another piece of the jigsaw puzzle, another piece of the surrealistic collage, which helps us to better understand children and another aspect of pedagogy.

From the perspective of a pedagogue, a researcher, and a curriculum developer, this study has profound significance for research, pedagogy, policy, and practice. It challenges us, as teachers, as researchers, as parents, and as policymakers, to pause and listen to the voices and perspectives of children. Through their lens, as we experience their lifeworld, pedagogy and praxis is validated. To sustain pedagogical practice that works for children, and to maintain its relevance within teaching and learning, it is necessary for research and schools, to embrace the voices and perspectives of children and their lived experiences. Until we do this, children's reading experiences and our conceptions of literacy will remain tethered to texts and constructions of schooling that belong to an earlier age and are out of touch with today's children and their lifeworlds. It is up to researchers and educators to open up spaces for children's input and it is up to children to lead us into their worlds and their lived experiences. To maintain a pedagogy

of relevance, keeping presence with children and listening to their perspectives is a necessary step.

From the perspective of policy and curriculum development, the findings of this study are a clear indication that there is a need for including the voices and perspectives of children in future developments intended for their purpose. This study illustrates that children's perspectives have the potential of untying the Gordian Knot to the mysteries and challenges of reading and the quest for solutions. This study indicates that children do have knowledge about their lived reading experiences and they are ready to share this with those who are willing to listen, respect, and embrace their insights. In future curriculum developments, a necessary first step is to go directly to children to listen to how they are experiencing the curricula and policy already in place and to invite their input for future developments. Children's voices have been silent over the years on matters involving reading policy and curriculum developed for them. Over the past couple of decades, regional policy and pedagogical developments in reading have continued the trend of excluding children from the development process. There is a need to rethink the way we position children in school, in texts, and in policy development and to give consideration to including child focus groups and phenomenological interviewing as information gathering processes in research that is used to inform future developments in reading.

The themes embedded within children's experiences call for a reconsideration of criterion referenced testing and its impact on children's ability to engage in school. The ethos within the classroom speaks of a preoccupation with testing that is shaping schools

in ways that are not conducive to critical thinking, critical pedagogy, and children's voices. From the unlevel playing fields to the silos that are created, children are being fenced in and controlled by governments and the invisible people that make decisions about whether they pass or fail. This calls for bringing the assessment closer to where the children are, back to the child and the teacher in the classroom.

From the perspective of primary teachers, the reading experiences of these children have important things to tell us about how they experience the world and the characteristics of texts which engage them. They navigate within shared spaces and find engagements with new conceptions of literacy away from the surveillance of schools. To honor directions that facilitate the inclusion of children's voices in matters that involve them, teachers need to share these spaces with children as co-participants. The power and control must find flexibility within these shared spaces where both the child and the pedagogue move back and forth across invisible boundaries and each voice has relevance. The diversities and complexities of children's texts can be reconciled within a negotiated space. The demands of new literacies require a critical pedagogy of relevance where children's natural instincts for curiosity and creativity can be celebrated in schools through engagements with multi-dimensional and multi-modal texts that already engage them outside of school. As the Grade Three boy informs us,

> *I like reading about things I'm interested in because when you read about things*
>
> *you're interested in, reading is easier...you know some of the words right away.*
>
> *You know...like Harry Potter books. As soon as I started reading Harry Potter,*

> *reading was easier and it was fun because I already knew some of the characters*
>
> *in the book...*

I would add that the lived experience of each individual child must be honored for its intellectual fruitfulness, by universities, schools, and bureaucracies. Accepting this notion is one of the first steps toward engaging children's voices in matters that involve them and this includes future pedagogical directions for reading.

Teachers are challenged to have a more holistic reading curriculum which honors the whole child. In a holistic view, the teacher draws on a range of resources to create a bricolage of practice that makes particular sense for each child. The changing conceptions of literacy has fed the "bandwagon" phenomenon and has from time to time rendered teachers powerless within their own classrooms. Teachers need to see themselves and the children as critical thinkers and researchers, with voices and insights that can be enabling for classrooms and schools. Together, they can be designers of a critical pedagogy. Using children's knowledge and insights within education and research can lead to developments and programs for reading that will better meet their needs and interests. Together, with children, teachers can take back some of the autonomy that has been usurped through the neo-liberal surveillance of governments and bureaucracies and loosen the strongholds of multinational corporations and the hegemonies of bandwagon theorists.

Reading pedagogy should give consideration to the untapped knowledge of children. For example, a multiliteracies framework (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000), relies on children's ability to draw on resources that are essential for participating in a range of

texts. Healy and Honan (2004) name these resources as: code-cracking resources; text-participating resources; text-using resources; and, text-analysing resources. They suggest that, in terms of pedagogy, all multiliteracies projects transcend traditional and, often, artificial curriculum boundaries where the linguistic takes its relational place beside other communication modes. A strong interpretation of the children's reading experiences, in this study, reveals themes of disengagements, disengaged processes, pretense, playing the game, and finding empowerment through their voices. These findings support a rationale for restoring the pedagogic or educational ground of reading for children. Children's descriptions "may be examined as an account of the possible experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 73) of other children.

This study has implications for areas other than reading. For example, designing and planning for primary schools cannot be done by adults alone. Children need to tell us what they think. What would children say about space allocations for primary classrooms, computers, printers, sinks, assistive technology, gymnasiums, television, drama, lunchrooms, books, games, colour, windows, cloakrooms, and washrooms?

In summary, phenomenological inquiry embraces the notion of keeping presence with research participants. Child-based inquiry approaches can generate data that can help enrich efforts aimed at improving reading and literacy instruction. The findings of this study calls for future research which honors the voices of children by moving into their spaces to explore other aspects of literacy and other aspects of their lived experiences with school policies and pedagogy that involve them. Macedo (1994a), cited in Agnello, suggests that the reforms that pervade educational bureaucracies speak of children as

"human resources" to be developed (p. 83). If children are to face the challenges of the 21st century, with confidence and skill, we need to teach them not only that they can acquire current knowledge, but also that they have voices that can shape what their society comes to accept as knowledge (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2003, p. 28). For it is necessary to open up spaces, "where persons speaking together and being together can discover what it signifies to incarnate and act upon values far too often taken for granted' (Greene, 1995, p. 68).

In today's postmodern world where realities are constructed, where grand narratives of schools around reading and literacy are in need of disruptions, is it time to rethink aspects of education around whose voices are heard, whose lived experiences are valid? The world of the school is grounded in grand narratives of an industrial world. Is it troublesome to remain there when outside of school knowledge information is expanding at an alarming rate? Is it fair to the children of today to keep them in schools that follow the discipline stratification, seating arrangements, and the agricultural calendar of a century ago?

For too long, in particular in Newfoundland and Labrador, children, young people, parents, teachers, and others have operated under a shroud of disengagements through a lack of participation in decisions that affect them. It is timely that the lived experience of individual children be validated through a focus on their telling of their lived experiences. Children have knowledge that is uniquely theirs. They have their "own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling and nothing is more foolish than to try and substitute ours for theirs" (Rousseau, 1883/1956, p. 39).

Postscript

This journey ends with a call for reflection for the reader of this dissertation. The research question, in this phenomenological study, is a question of meaning to be inquired into for the end can never be quite known.

In November, 2007, five months after leaving my co-researchers, I received an e-mail from Jessica, titled, in big bold letters: I REALLY MISS YOU BEING WITH US. This reverberated with me in the days ahead as I continued with the writing of this dissertation. I was comforted, yet challenged, to elucidate what an eight-year-old child could mean by writing: BEING WITH US...

BEING WITH...

BEING....

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Introduction and Request for School District Approval

Faculty of Education
Memorial University
St. John's, NL
March, 2007

Mr. Ed Walsh
Assistant Director
Eastern School District
Atlantic Place, Water Street
St. John's, NL

Dear Mr. Walsh:

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, St. John's. I am currently conducting research, under the supervision of Dr. Barrie Barrell, as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education). My research proposal has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee at Memorial University. I am writing to provide information regarding my research project, a phenomenological study of children's perceptions of their reading experiences, so as to help you decide whether you would agree to a Grade Three class in one of your rural schools participating in this study.

I am exploring the research question "*What are children's experiences with reading?*" The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of the essence of children's experiences with reading. I believe children's perceptions can help increase awareness and understanding about how they are experiencing reading in their lives both in- and out-of-school.

Research has rarely gone to children directly for their perceptions of reading. I believe that identifying the reading experiences of a group of children will be interesting and informative for parents, pre-service and experienced teachers, as well as curriculum developers, faculties of education, and researchers. Given that reading is such a key subject area for primary children and more and more traditional print literacy is being challenged by new literacies, it is timely and important to learn directly from children themselves about how they are experiencing it. I have intentionally chosen, as participants for this study, Grade Three children because they are at a level where most, if not all of them, will be able to articulate their perceptions of their reading experiences through art, writing, observation, interviews, and focus group discussions.

The data collection procedures that I will use are: observation, interviews, collage, letter writing, and discussion. Phase One of the study will be the observation component. I will attend class, mornings and afternoons, for a two-week period. The observation component will provide an opportunity for rapport-building during the first week of the

study. Phase Two will provide an opportunity for whole group participation in particular activities (e.g., read alouds; reading activities associated with a range of texts such as books, digital texts, electronic games, posters, magazines, toys; conversation, collage construction, and letter writing) connected to outcomes from the language arts curriculum. Phases Three and Four of the study will consist of interviews and focus groups with a subgroup of 9 children who appear to be particularly articulate, actively engaged, and interested in talking about reading.

I have met with the principal of the school and discussed the possibility of conducting this study with a Grade Three class in her school and she is agreeable to it, pending approval from your office. She has also suggested a particular Grade Three class for the study. I have agreed that I would be interested in giving back to the school in some way. For example, we have discussed the possibility of my being a guest artist at the school. I will also share the final report with the school.

My interest in how children experience reading stems from my years (18 of which were spent with the Avalon Consolidated School District) as a primary-elementary teacher of reading, my perception of the influence of a range of texts on reading engagement, and what I have read about the implications of reading engagement for literacy achievement.

All information collected, audiotaped and transcribed from interviews and focus group discussions will be coded (without names) and stored in a locked cabinet for five years. After this period the collected materials will be destroyed as per Memorial University's Tri-Council Policy. My jot notes and journal will be considered confidential material as well. No information will be included in the final report that will identify the children, parents, or the school. The collages will be given to the school for disbursement to children

If you have any concerns or questions please feel free to contact me at 737-8621 or 753-2632 or my supervisor, Dr. Barrie Barrell, at 737-7559 or the Office of the Vice-President (Research) at 737-2530.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Linda Coles
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

Letter of Introduction to the Principal

<div align="right">
Faculty of Education
Memorial University
St. John's, NL
March, 2007
</div>

Principal
Rural School, NL

Dear Principal:

Following our discussion in September, 2006, regarding my interest in conducting a study in your school, pending approval from the Eastern School District Office, I am including a formal letter of introduction for you.

As a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, St. John's, my research proposal has been approved by the Ethics Committee at Memorial University and I have also received approval from the Eastern School District to conduct the research study at your school, if this meets with your approval.

My research will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Barrie Barrell, as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education). I am writing to provide information regarding my research project, a phenomenological study of children's perceptions of their reading experiences, so as to help you decide whether you would agree to a Grade Three class in your school participating in this study.

I am exploring the research question "*What are children's experiences with reading?*" The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of the essence of children's experiences with reading. I believe children's perceptions can help increase awareness and understanding about how they are experiencing reading in their lives both in- and out-of-school.

Research has rarely gone to children directly for their perceptions of reading. I believe that identifying the reading experiences of a group of children will be interesting and informative for parents, pre-service and experienced teachers, as well as curriculum developers, faculties of education, and researchers. Given that reading is such a key subject area for primary children, it is important to learn directly from children about how they are experiencing it. I have intentionally chosen, as participants for this study, Grade Three children because they are at a level where most, if not all of them, will be able to articulate their perceptions of their reading experiences through art, writing, observation, interviews, and focus group discussions.

The data collection procedures that I will use over the four-weeks are: observation, interviews, collage, letter writing, and focus group. Phase One of the study will be the observation component. I will attend class, mornings and afternoons, for a two-week period. The observation component will provide an opportunity for rapport-building. Phase Two of the study will provide an opportunity for observation and whole group participation in particular activities (e.g., read alouds; reading activities associated with a range of texts such as books, digital texts, electronic games, posters, magazines, toys; conversation, collage construction, and letter writing) connected to outcomes from the language arts curriculum. Phases Three and Four of the study will consist of interviews and focus groups with a subgroup of 9 children who appear to be particularly articulate, actively engaged, and interested in talking about reading.

As per our discussion in the fall, I am interested in giving back to the school in some way such as teaching an art lesson . For example, we discussed the possibility of my being a guest artist at the school. I will also share the final report with the school.

My interest in reading engagement stems from my years (18 of which were spent with the Avalon Consolidated School District) as a primary-elementary teacher of reading, my perception of the influence of a range of texts on reading engagement, and what I have read about the implications of reading engagement for literacy achievement.

All information collected, audiotaped and transcribed from interviews and focus group discussions will be coded (without names) and stored in a locked cabinet for five years. After this period the collected materials will be destroyed as per Memorial University's Tri-Council Policy. My jot notes and journal will be considered confidential material as well. No information will be included in the final report that will identify the children, parents, or the school. The collages will be given to the school for disbursement to children.

If you have any concerns or questions please feel free to contact me at 737-8621 or 753-2632 or my supervisor, Dr. Barrie Barrell, at 737-7559 or the Office of the Vice-President (Research) at 737-2530.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Linda Coles
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

Parent Information Letter and Consent Form

Room E 4004
Faculty of Education
Memorial University
St. John's, NL
April 18, 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, St. John's. I am currently conducting research, under the supervision of Dr. Barrie Barrell, as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education). Because I will be conducting my research in your child's Grade Three classroom, I am writing to provide information regarding my project entitled "Children's Lived Experiences with Reading" so as to help you decide whether you would agree to your child's participation in this study.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of children's reading experiences by finding out from children themselves about their reading experiences. I am interested in going directly to children to find out from them about their reading experiences. Even though reading is such a key subject area for Grade Three children, research has rarely focused on what children themselves say about their reading experiences. I believe that identifying the reading experiences of a group of children will be interesting and informative for children, parents, teachers, and other educators. The process for this study will involve children engaging in reading, writing and art activities, as well as a conversational interview and a small group discussion. These activities will be within the parameters of the Grade Three language arts curriculum. The interview session and the focus group discussion will be audiotaped for ease of transcribing.

All information shared with me will be treated as confidential and your child's name will not be used in the final report for this study. Audiotapes and transcribed notes will be coded and stored in a locked cabinet until they are destroyed five years later. However, any art or writing projects will be given to your child after the study is completed.

Should you choose to support your child's participation in this study, I will need you to sign the enclosed consent form.

Permission for this study has been received from the Eastern School District as well as the Principal of your school. If you have any concerns or questions please feel free to contact me at 737-8621or 753-2632 or my supervisor, Dr. Barrie Barrell, at 737-7559.

Two copies of the consent form are provided. If you agree with your child's participation in this study, as outlined above, please sign both forms. Keep one for your records and return the other to me in care of your school Principal as soon as possible.

Thank you for your co-operation and for your support for this research.

Sincerely,

Linda Coles
Doctoral Candidate

Enc/: Consent for Research Participation Form and Approval from Eastern School District

Consent For Research Participation Form (2 copies)

Research Project Title: "Children's Lived Experiences With Reading"
Researcher: Linda Coles

This research project is exploring the question "*What are children's experiences with reading?*" The goal of the study is to develop an understanding of how children are experiencing reading in their daily lives. The information gained from listening to children's perceptions about their reading experiences will help increase awareness of the nature of reading in the child's world. The study will be conducted with Grade Three children who will be interested in sharing their insights about reading. Identifying the reading experiences of these children will be interesting for children, teachers, parents, and other educators.

The study will begin the last week of April and will conclude the first week of June. For the observation phase, I will attend class for two weeks and will involve the whole class in language arts activities using different types of texts such as books, magazines, posters, cartoons, electronic games, children's movie, art, writing and toys, for approximately one hour each day. These activities will be within the parameters of the Grade Three English Language Arts Curriculum. This observation phase will enable me to get to know the children and develop a rapport with them. I don't want the children to be in any way intimidated by my presence in the classroom.

I will maintain jot notes, during the observation period. These notes will be treated as confidential. At the end of the first two weeks I will identify 8-10 children from the Grade Three class to participate in two interviews and a focus group discussion. The interviews and focus group sessions will be audiotaped and transcribed. The jot notes from the observation period, as well as the interview data, and focus group discussion data will be stored in a locked cabinet for five years after which time they will be destroyed. No information will be included in the final report that will identify your child or the school.

Throughout the study, I will be mindful of the need to be sincere with children, to help them feel comfortable around me, and to ensure that the activities and experiences provided for them will always be at an appropriate level which honors and respects their interest and developmental needs.

Your signature on this form indicates that you understand the information regarding your child's participation in the research project and agree that your child can participate. However, this does not relieve the researcher, the sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities for your child. Feel free to ask for clarification or new information at any time. You are advised that you are free to withdraw your child from this study at any time throughout the study.

The Eastern School Board has granted consent for this research project and a copy of that letter is attached. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research project, please contact: Linda Coles at 737-8621 or 753-2632 or Dr. Barrie Barrell at 737-7559. If you have any concerns with this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, you may also contact the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies at Memorial University at 737-3402.

My sincere thanks for your support for this project.

Sincerely,

Linda Coles
Doctoral Student

_____   _____
Parent's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Witness' Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

Bracketing

In line with authors such as Langeveld, and Moustakas, van Manen's approach to phenomenology is "practical", existential and hermeneutic (but not theoretically philosophical). When van Manen uses the word "phenomenology" it usually means interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology. "Phenomenology" refers to the method associated with our attentiveness to the lifeworld or lived experience, and hermeneutics refers to the notion that all explication of meaning is inevitably interpretive. As well, phenomenology is a form of inquiry that tries to gain a view of the assumptions, grounds, preunderstandings, and presuppositions associated with the ways in which we experience and understand the concerns of our lifeworld. Ultimately phenomenology is without method: it distrusts any theory or preconceived set of rules for conducting research. Phenomenology cannot be learned as an external set of skills or objective concepts. It must be appropriated in a personal manner.

Bracketing, May 20, 2007 (11:30 am)

D.   Ok, getting ready to come here this morning what thoughts dominated your mind?

L.   Actually, the thoughts that dominated my mind this morning were probably connected with the experiences I'm having with children (in the study) right now during the observation phases.

D.   So the need to begin processing that?

L.   Yes, to begin processing and probably to reflect on similarities with my own experiences as well, as a child, believe it or not.

D.   Ah...that's such a phenomenological viewpoint...the need to incorporate your experience and how you derive meaning. van Manen talks about entering into the lived experiences, of these kids, experiencing it as they experience it and reflecting on it as it holds meaning for you as much as identifying the meaning it holds for them, that shared perspective, that shared experience. So, what do you want to get out of the study?

L.   What I'd like to get out of it is I'd like to hear what children have to say about reading. We have heard so much over the years, from psychologists, sociologists, the media, from parents, and teachers, telling children what's good for them and which books they need to read, and which types of reading material they should be using, and that kind of thing.

Because I have a bit of an understanding of the different types of texts that children are engaging in outside of school. I believe children are the only ones that can tell us about those experiences, and to tell us about those experiences within the context of reading, both in and out of school.

D.   You said something interesting there. This is the third or fourth conversation, maybe the tenth, so as you're saying something now I'm thinking about something you said before. You just said, "telling children what's good for them."

L.   Yes, I'm afraid, based on casual conversations that I've had with children, that we haven't moved very far beyond constructions of childhood, traditional constructions of childhood where children are viewed as subjects and possessions, and they have encounters with these all powerful, full of knowledge grown-ups, be it teachers, parents, or others.

D.   So why is that significant for you, personally?

L.   Personally, I guess I experienced a silence in my childhood and I think over the years, too, in my teaching. Silent children were viewed as good children. A lot of teachers preferred that children be silent. I can give an example of a gifted child that I worked with. I worked with gifted children for about 12 years, and this particular child had been moved from another school and then another class within the school. He couldn't get along with the primary teacher there or the teacher from the other school. The previous teacher, in trying to give me advice about the child, said, "I don't let him tell me that he knows how to do something already. He has to do it again with the other children." Later this said to me, "You know, Miss Coles, you're the first teacher that I've had that has let me say what I think and don't make me do over the stuff I already know how to do."

That struck a cord with me because as a child I experienced that being finished lots of times and I wasn't allowed to say anything about it. So when I used the time to talk I would be reprimanded by the teacher, "Linda, have you finished that already? Well, go to the back of the book and do page 56." Then the teacher would tell me to fold my hands and face the board until every child is finished. So you felt like a problem. I think the silence that I experienced caused me problems as a child and as a teenager because I wanted someone to talk to about it. I wanted to be able to talk to a teacher. When I came to University it was a real blessing for me because I found my voice and I found out that you could express opinions and you could ask questions.

D.   It's interesting that one of the dominant things you're feeling now is a desire to talk. Is that desire still there?

L.   Yes, that desire is still there and at this point to take the voice of children and to be able to put that voice forward in some kind of way. I remember the day you and I talked at Chapters. When I told you want I wanted to do I remember you saying "phenomenology" right away and the more I explored it the more I realized what a fit this was for my research question.

D.   How so? Why? Why did you want to use a phenomenological approach to this?

L.   I wanted to go directly to children and not to what others had to say, because I believe there's something in their lived experience that we can only get from children. While this would be a small group, I believe getting at the essence of how these children experience reading could be enlightening and could be...

D.   Looking back do you think there is something in your childhood that went unacknowledged?

L.   Yes, for example I remember enjoying drawing, coloring, and folding paper to make boats. These activities were not viewed in a positive light in school. I remember making all those little paper boats, Dave. I don't know if you remember making paper boats as a child? I remember having them all lined up around my desk and being told to put it all away and to fold my hands and face the board. Also, in terms of religion, there were many instances where I was confused about what grown-ups were asking us to do, like the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, there were lots of words I couldn't understand, and I would liaison words in the Lord's Prayer, for example, Our Father chart in heaven, and lead a snot (us not) into temptation. I was really confused by that because I was hearing a word that, under normal circumstances, we were not allowed to say but within the context of praying I was using a "bad" word. We were told that we were not supposed to use bad words and God did not want us to use bad words but here it appeared in the context of prayer. I wondered silently why we were allowed to use this bad word in the Lord's Prayer. It caused me a lot of confusion and around about Grade Three I decided that I didn't believe in God anymore because it was all confusing and none of it made sense to me. And the only person at that time that I was safe to share it with was my younger brother, who when I asked him if he believed in God quite readily said, "Nope!" I wouldn't share it with anyone else. I thought I was evil, actually because I did not believe in God. Another thing I did was to speak to the setting sun over the Strait of Belle Isle. I use to talk to the sun in the evening. I would go to the pantry and look out at the sun setting behind the hills of Labrador and it was almost like the Oracle of Delphi when the great leaders would journey to Delphi and ask the Oracle questions because they knew they would get the answer they wanted. While this might seem rather innocent I think it was a way of me getting control of my voice. I would tell the sun that I would count to 100 and if it went below the horizon by the time I counted to 100 that was a sign from the sun that it was agreeing with me. Sometimes I would have to drag out the counting so that I would get the answer I wanted.

Later in life after my father died I started showing respect for my own voice through painting more. It was a traumatic time in my life because he was a person that I could talk to and now he was gone. I was doing my masters degree. I completed it just before he died. My painting started to surface as my voice. For years I had been painting and just shoving them into closets or under beds. I was doing abstract art then. People thought it was crazy and I felt that I wasn't communicating. I did a painting of what I thought my father was all about. I painted my experiences. Then someone wanted to buy that painting. I couldn't believe it. I sold it because it was going into a school. I think my voice was finally heard within the painting. I remember painting *Writing Lines* with the girl at the board. I remember that being a wonderful experience.

D.   So, is it that you were engaged in a practice of trying to be heard or engaged in a practice of negotiating meaning?

L.   I think it is a combination of both. Giving voice to let's say phenomena in our society that we just take for granted, for example tradition, cultural and religious perspectives, that I've questioned and written poetry and stories about...

D.   Different ways of being, different ways of knowing, different ways of expressing. You talked to the sun about having to believe in the son.

L.   I would do it kind of secretively. I think my mother interpreted my connections with nature as a kind of melancholy or sadness but I enjoyed those engagements with the sun, the waves, and the storms.

D.   Were you lonely?

L.   No it wasn't a lonely feeling. Funny...I was alone with my thoughts but not lonely. I think I became content but that evolution to becoming content was a struggle. My oldest sister got married when I was a teenager. My father refused to fall in line with the traditional role of walking her up the aisle to "give her away". My father questioned things. I did too. He did not believe in this notion and accepted practice of "giving away" a daughter.

D.   You make reference to yourself and wonder whether you were viewed as a problem. Is the problem that you wondered or is the problem that you couldn't question?

L.   I would like children to have a voice, probably based on my own experiences. I found that Grade One children would misinterpret the advertising around Ninja turtles that didn't fly and the figure skater that didn't skate. They couldn't get to the essence of what grown-ups were representing through their advertising.

D.   What are your top ten favourite things to do? Why this question to start with? Different texts for reading...

L.   Well, I thought it would help them to feel comfortable and let them know that I was sincere about my interest in their lived experiences.

D.   I'm wondering is it that you want to validate what they do or whatever they ascribe meaning to?

L.   I do believe that we have to try to move into children's spaces and validate what they say, listen to what they say, and take meaning from what they say.

D.   van Manen talks a lot about shared space, and lots of others talk about shared space, negotiated space, contested space...

L.   I think children are sharing spaces all day long.

D.   With one another?

L.   With one another. Some are not and I think those children are really struggling, with cultural things, school, and traditional school activities.

D.   Did you?

L.   I didn't struggle in terms of being able to achieve.

D.   But did you struggle in being able to share a space?

L.   Yes, because it wasn't safe to share. You wouldn't talk to your parents about confusions around a nighttime prayer. For example, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" ...I would say the prayer...then jump into bed and negotiate with God asking God to ignore the part about "If I should die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take". You would never dream of saying anything about this to your parents or to anybody older than you. You could say it to a younger person. I could say it to my younger brother. Because I thought he was safe. He was sort've like talking to the sun. He agreed with me.

D.   All of your images about your childhood are terribly alone. Would you want a child to have to do that or would you want a child to be able to negotiate meaning with a person?

L.   I would want a child to be able to negotiate meaning with a person, to have a voice, because you go through a lot of years of wondering and feeling that you're different, unusual, and this followed right up to my teaching at Macdonald Drive. I remember working with gifted children, feeling alone, and trying to help them to build on where they were. It was probably viewed by some as crazy to be trying to teach gifted children. Just let them move through the pages themselves. They can teach themselves. I believed so much that they needed teaching and support for their learning. Gifted children need to be challenged and motivated just as other children do. I felt they deserved it. As a child I spent a lot of time treading water and waiting to move on to new knowledge, new ideas, new learning, waiting for others to finish. My learning may have been more enriched. I believe in making some kind of a contribution to the world. It may be as small as a mustard seed but I believe in making that contribution. Something in my life that really stands out is childhood and teenage years, and not having a voice.

D.   Do you have a voice now?

L.   Dave, at the DOE I went back to the same thing. I seemed to return to the same sort of thing that I had as a child. I realized after a while, at the DOE, that I wasn't going to be able to contribute and it was probably one of the saddest points in my life. At the DOE I did all of these wonderful things and had all of these wonderful accolades. I played a key role at the APEF table developing curriculum and my work was validated by colleagues and educators in our own province and from other provinces. When I had the teachers with me it was ok.

During my teaching, I wrote many books for children because we didn't have appropriate books in our schools. I felt it was time to move beyond this sort of thing and try to do something about it. As teachers, we were buying books on a regular basis for our

classrooms. Buying children's books was part of my personal expenses on a monthly basis.

I applied for the job at the DOE because it seemed to be a way of using my experiences to do some good because I knew the realities of the classroom. The day I found out that I had the job I was so happy because I thought the time had come when I could help make a difference for children and teachers. I remember an awful experience when I tried to explain to my superior that we needed to get rid of Hickory Hollow because it was just a workbook type thing. It had been authorized for kindergarten as "the book" for about 20 years. I wanted to bring Big Books and real literature into schools. I guess it was the best of times and the worst of times because I did manage to get Big Books and literature collections into the classrooms, and develop ELA curriculum, Kinderstart, Early Beginnings...can you believe trying to get books in primary classrooms was the real struggle...and then there was the loss of my voice.

D.   There's a big parallel there...a huge parallel. I see a contested voice in childhood space, revisited at the DOE...and then a negotiated voice in abstract images...and people outside of yourself...negotiated voice at the DOE... The only time I hear a shared voice is when you're interacting with kids and teachers. I imagine going back to the DOE allowed you, in many ways, to revisit your childhood.

L.   Yes.

D.   It had to be trauma.

L.   I had nightmares. I needed to be able to speak to somebody about the discord. There were so many things that were wrong in terms of children and teachers and school districts and I became aware of things that were being manipulated. Probably one of the worse things that ever happened to me was around the Read and Succeed campaign to promote reading as a family thing to do. I had no voice there. It was a wonderfully successful story but at the same time there were a lot of things that happened within government. For example, the people that I reported to decided what the slogan would be and were adamant about it. I didn't think it was a good way to go but I had no say. They didn't heed the results from the focus groups that were presented to them by the marketing firm. The firm established focus groups but the executive within the DOE put them aside and went their own way. The focus groups consisted of teachers, school district personnel, High School students, representatives from CBC Radio and the Literacy Development Council, and Community Centres. The decision making person in the DOE made it clear that the slogan was to be Read and Succeed because reading had to be linked with succeeding. You don't have a say in this stuff in the DOE. It's a shame because they only want to hear from you after they make the decisions. Having been a primary teacher, gave me less of a voice than if I had taught High School.

D.   That's religion there. Many of the images around childhood and the church and prayer, and there are no voices around religion...alone... the power...You said two things there - discord with the way I thought about things and I was aware of the things being manipulated inside the DOE.

L.   I had to get a mentor. This came through a relative of mine. I knew I could trust him to keep it confidential and he could understand the bureaucracy within government, the church, and the school system.

D.   When you talk about childhood, etc., you always link it to religion and the spiritual. You said that religion has to be based on where we are. Do you believe that good literature has to be based on where children are? Is there a parallel there?

L.   Yes. I believe too often we're swimming against the tide, with children. We're making decisions about what's good for children without going to them to ask for their perceptions, their voices.

D.   You only referenced literature a couple of times, to ascribe meaning, when you referenced Hickory Hollow and now when you reference the DOE official. So are you inquirng about children's reading or children's process of negotiating meaning? Is reading the question or is reading a means into the question? Are you asking how children use reading to ascribe meaning and validate meaning to their world?

L.   I would like to hear from children about their experiences with reading. Curriculum developers define it in certain ways. How do children experience reading?

D.   You talked extensively about meaning but not about literature (e.g., father not wanting to walk daughter down the aisle, Rocky Harbour scenario, making boats, etc.).

L.   Reading enters into it because this is an area of the curriculum where we're making decisions about which texts, which curriculum, children should...

D.   Which texts...the texts of our lives... So are you looking at how children find meaning through reading or are you looking at how children use reading to validate meaning? Are you asking the question how children find meaning with reading or are you asking the question how children use reading to validate their meaning and how ? Different ways of being, different ways of meaning...the texts of our lives... I've written down tons of comments here and they're not about reading...they're about meaning... So what do you think these kids are going to tell you?

L.   They're going to say "I hate reading", and they're going to say in school I like gym, music, recess, lunch, science. At home I like the computer, I like TV, I like playing with my pets, I like playing with my friends, I like swimming, I like sports.

D.   How will that fit with your experiences of looking out the pantry window, talking to the sun, talking to the waves, etc.? These hold more meaning to you than reading. You didn't mention reading. So today, how does that fit into...

L.   I think the way we define reading, the way we teach reading and the way we isolate children, so many children have problems with reading, someone comes to the door of the classroom and beckons to the child to come out for reading, and he slams the door as he's going out. That for me is a real strong indication that I'm made to feel different, I

have to leave my classroom and go with another teacher, I'm a problem, and there are some things about reading that I don't know, so I am a problem...it's isolating,

D.   What's it gonna be like to hear that? What emotions have come up as you have entered the space of these children?

L.   I think I'll feel sad that I've been part of a system for all those years that is today in the 21st century still excluding children's voices when we need so much for children's minds to be engaged. Our world is so much more complex than when you and I were children...the ozone layer, the rainforest, the fishery, technology.

D.   But is it so much more complex...what's the difference between talking to Nintendo and talking to the waves?

L.   When I say complex I mean almost in terms of saving the world. Problems of the world have accumulated and I think this pushing the voice back has caused so many problems to surface and it comes through in decisions that are made without respecting certain voices. For example, certain subjects are important. There are so many advancements in technology but we don't put it all together.

D.   The story of our lives - is this story of our lives a text or is this story of our lives a visual? Like rural Newfoundland ...my childhood...people love the story...I'm watching this story...catch my story...my story...soap operas...yet the reality of rural Newfoundland life and the reality of Mack and Rachel...there was no parallel.

L.   Was there a parallel I wonder in terms of desire? Longing to know? A better world? Is it a case of, I've been in this relationship and living in a community where divorce is not condoned or acceptable...but I can live vicariously through the lives of the actors...cultural things around it so now I can enter into this world where I can actually hear people saying...I don't want to live here anymore...

D.   It's safe to question in someone else's space but it's not safe to question in your own space. A few minutes ago when I asked about emotions the first words that came from you was "sad". As I'm sitting here watching you being interviewed I can see that you're sad. You said "I feel sad about being a part of a system for so many years." Is that sad or guilt?

L.   I don't feel guilt strangely enough. I feel comfortable that I've always had the voice of children with me. Sometimes I have said that I must have been born with this inclination, this gift. I seem to have some insight into children even though I've never had my own children. I think it's from my own childhood and the children I've experienced over the years. I think it's more of a sadness, not a guilt. I feel like I'm trying to contribute to the lives of children, to their world in some small way. I think I was always there for children. Maybe because of my own experience as a child.

D.   When I ask you that question do you feel guilt? Do you feel a need to defend yourself because you immediately launched into defending yourself.

L.   Ok. No, I don't actually.

D.   I'm sitting here thinking this is a quest about validating ways of knowing. You
        mentioned earlier about constructions of childhood. Is it constructions of childhood,
        constructions of knowledge and constructions of education? Constructions of education
        and how it affects childhood and our intuitive way of knowing these people, this is
        education, children waiting for someone to validate him.

L.   Key to all of that is reading, for me. I feel if we have a world where more people read,
        really read, and gain knowledge, read in a critical way, read different texts...

D.   If the key to all that is reading, what about the kids in Africa who don't know how to
        read? Do they know less? How about those with severe dyslexia who will never read?
        Mental retardation?

L.   Children in Africa, I feel that they don't have a voice. I feel if Rhuanda had been
        Canada, the US, the UK, or Australia, the United Nations would have gone in. The
        massacre may not have happened.

D.   What I'm asking about is not Africa, mental retardation or dyslexia...it's about the
        significance of the reading...is it just about reading? Is it just about reading in,
        Newfoundland and Labrador, North America, or wherever? Or is it about the voice of
        children and the construction of knowledge and the construction of meaning and how?

L.   Yes. I believe it's about constructions of children, voice of children and that you can get
        at through reading...because my thinking is that we're out of sync with children with
        reading.

D.   So it's about validating the space of children...so reading is a means to the bigger
        question. Now I want you to think about what it's like for you to be here today and have
        me interview you? I purposely asked you this question because I want you to be engaged
        with the process of knowing. I want you to start thinking about this conversation and not
        focus on doing. I want this conversation to launch you into a reflective process. Live the
        question, see how you found meaning from this and then sit down and write about this.
        Phenomenology doesn't want you to do, it wants you to enter into, as you live it, and
        reflect on it, and the doing will come. Phenomenology wants you to live it and reflect on
        it. It was only when I was with the knowing that I could figure it out.
        During the interview you shared my space, an intuitive knowing. We ascribe our
        experiences to their experiences, Ben's prayer. It's too big to get at or too painful to
        touch. Your paintings are stark. Pain is stark.

L.   It helps drag me back to look at where all of this is coming from.

D.   You're looking at the text of your life through the text of their lives. Wait a minute. You
        mentioned the essence and you said you feel powerless. You're in the classroom with a
        teacher who has daily prayers, probably the last (....) in Newfoundland. What stronger
        image of power. It's surreal. They hear CRT and they're attentive; you heard "lead a snot

into temptation,"and you were attentive. Do you need me to validate this. You said when you get right down to the essence of this I guess it is sad, a longing for...

L.   I'm overwhelmed with the powerlessness.

D.   Phenomenology never directs intervention it lays an opportunity there for you to hear another story and it forces you to reflect on your own. I need the validation that it's heard. When I go to Calgary I go to the library to see how many times my dissertation has been signed out.

APPENDIX E

Whole Group Activities

The following activities were conducted with the whole class before any decisions were made about the sub-group of participants for the interviews and focus groups.

Activitiy # 1- Top Five Favourite Things To Do
After a discussion about the different places where they would engage in activities during the different seasons of the year, the children were given a sheet of paper and asked to think about then list their top five favourite things to do.

Activity # 2- Top Five Favourite things to do In School
I engaged the children in a brief discussion and reflection on the previous list of their top favourite things to do. Then they were given a sheet of paper and asked to think about and list the top favourite things they enjoyed doing in school.

Activitiy # 3- Top Five Favourite Things To Do At Home
After a brief discussion and reflection on Activities # 1 and #, the children were asked to think about and list the top favourite things they enjoyed doing at home. They listed their top favourite at-home activities on a sheet of paper.

Activity # 4 - Acrostic Poem about Reading
After some discussion about reading, the children were given a sheet of paper with the word "R-E-A-D-I-N-G" written vertically on the page. They constructed poems about reading.

Activity # 5 - A Letter to An Imaginary Friend About Their Experiences With Reading
After some discussion about letter-writing the children constructed their own letters about their reading experiences.

Activity # 6 -Read Aloud Session, *Charlotte's Web*
Reading aloud was typically done for a short period each day. This particular book was read prior to viewing it in a movie format.

Activity # 7 - Read Aloud Session, *Something from Nothing*
The picture book, *Something from Nothing.* was read in one session. It provided an opportunity for the children to engage in a shared reading experience.

Activity # 8 - Read Aloud Session, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*
The picture book, The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales, was read in one session.

Activity # 9 - Viewing a Movie, *Charlotte's Web*
The viewing of the movie. *Charlotte's Web.* was done after the book had been read.

Activity # 10 - Listening to CD, *Wind Over Dark Tickle*
Wind Over Dark Tickle. is one of the provincially authorized books for Grade Three. The CD provided an opportunity for experiencing another different text format.

Activity #11 - Poster Discussions

Prior to children constructing their collages, I engaged the children in a discussion on various posters.

Activity # 12 - Reading, *Digit's Clean-Air Adventure; Asterix the Gaul; Meanwhile...*

These books provided an opportunity for children to experience cartoons and print.

Activity # 13 - sharing electronic games

Children shared electronic games during recess and lunch sessions.

Activity #14 - Collage Construction

Each child created a collage about their favourite thing to do.

Children's Books Used During Observation in Phases One and Two

Bogart, J. E., Fernandez, L., & Jacobson, R. (1997). *Jeremiah learns to read*. Markham, ON: Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Coles, L. & Keeping, N. (2006). *Digit's clean-air adventure*. St. John's, NL: Lung Association NL.

Gilman, P. (1992). *Something from nothing*. Markham, ON: Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Goscinny, R., & Uderzo, A. (1962). *Asterix and the golden sickle*. (A. Bell & D. Hockridge, Trans.). London, UK: Orion Books Ltd. (Original title, La Serpe D'Or).

Polacco, P. (1998). *Thank you, Mr. Falker*. New York, NY: Philomel books.

Scieszka, J. & Smith, L. (1992). *The stinky cheese man and other fairly stupid tales*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd.

Walter, H. & West, E. (1996). *Wind over dark tickle*. St. John's, NL: Breakwater