

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF STORY: A GRADE SIX CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

What is the essence of story? What makes a story? What is it to listen to a story? What is it to become a storyteller? What is it that keeps us keen to story--that satisfies us, but leaves us contemplating more than simple resolution?

These are the questions of this curriculum study. Often, once children leave the primary school grades, we, as teachers, assume that they have the capacity to read for themselves and that it is no longer necessary to read to them. What happens when oral story is given a place in the intermediate and middle classroom? What can we learn from students' responses to and interaction with story? How do children make sense of stories that may have little or no resemblance to their daily reality? This study focuses on a grade six classroom. Research of the lived experience of the student in his/her encounter with oral story is approached as a phenomenological question.

What happens when the child encounters story? What basic concepts underlie children's understandings of story?

How are these translated into reality? What kind of meanings do children seem to find in stories? Are these logical, rational, moral, affective? Do stories serve as more than a means for developing imagination? This research describes the experiences as reported and verbalized by children in a grade six classroom in order to understand how imaginary content transfers into real content. The research looks at themes as they emerge in students' writings and dialogues.

Phenomenological research is a matter of gaining insight--of investigating experience as we live it, rather than as we conceptualize it. Phenomenological research is a matter of careful and thoughtful reflection on the essential themes that characterize student encounter with story. It is also a matter of dialogue--a collaborative activity involving teller, listener, and text.

The curriculum study is practical. It seeks to provide for the justification and legitimation of the use of oral story in the classroom--and not just for preschool and elementary children. It is practical in that it attempts to provide fundamental understandings of the student/teacher experience in coming to know story (the commonalities of the story experience). It is practical in being critical and reflective, leaning on interpretative and interpersonal understandings. The research focuses on what children say. The use of phenomenological research here is to study the world as we experience it, taking into

account social conditions and historical situations relevant to genuine understanding of the students. It involves an awareness of sensation and concept--myself and others, teacher and students.

In this research, using story in the classroom is seen as a way of teaching--to keep communication and the creation of meanings as central activities. The use of story in the curriculum is seen as a way of allowing the teacher to become sensitive to ways children experience the complexity of the elements of story. Story is seen as a form of communication--as a way of inviting others into the listening and telling experience. What is the secret of story that captivates us? What is it that allows for dialogue of various dimensions? In inviting children to story, we invite a different response than that which results from calling them to task. Since teaching is in part the communication of meanings, story can play a significant part in understanding how children find or do not find meaning in the context of what and how we teach.



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Dedicated to my children

Michael Kardash
Peter Dean Kardash
Benjamin Timothy Andrew Kardash

I. STORY AS A CURRICULUM ORIENTATION

A. Awareness of student orientation

Teaching involves more than technical expertise: it is the communication of meaning. If, we, as teachers, are to understand the world as lived by the student, then we need to become aware of how students orient themselves within the classroom context of what and how we teach.

Educational research here attempts to be a thoughtful exploration to understand the realities as they exist for the students, not as a set of empirical questions but as research designed to question the way teachers and students experience a particular curriculum orientation.

If we take this need for understanding the student experience as central to the being of a teacher, then study and research in the area of curriculum needs to look at ways to develop meaningful curriculum whereby our children can grow up not only to be consumers, but to be thinkers, creators, and caring adults as well. As teachers, we might attempt to put into practice our knowledge of student orientation to better understand the teacher-learner relationship and what happens to the curriculum in-between. According to M. van Manen, "co-orientational grasping" refers to the conscious "grasping" of the situation/orientation of another.¹ When, as parents, we turn to play with a child, we momentarily suspend our

belief in reality and partake in the beliefs and feelings of the child.² Similarly, as we attempt to understand what it is like to be a student, we can posit the questions: What is the nature of the student's orientation? "What kind of reality do young people live in?" "What is the nature of their beliefs?" "What is considered valuable and important within their orientation toward their social world?"³

B. Story as a way of gaining insight into student/teacher life experiences

Taking curriculum at a micro-level, I wish to turn to story as curriculum--as a way of gaining insight into student/teacher life experiences, as a way for children and teacher to find meaning. For Kieran Egan, "children's access to meaning in curriculum has...become a matter of too slight concern...."⁴ "The story is one of the basic forms in which we [can] recognize events and facts to make them meaningful".⁵ We know that, in following story, it is necessary to have a sense of causality, to understand relationships and underlying concepts such as the nature of the characters. T. Johnson says that "children enjoy stories, rhymes, poems, riddles, puns, jokes and plays. They are intrigued by dragons, dwarfs, journeys, seven-league boots, anger, sorrow, joy, death, loss and hope. [But] we have never met a child who became excited

about short vowels, digraphs, hard or soft c's or diphthongs."⁶ What happens when the child encounters story and when meanings are created?

The nine-year-old seems not to understand what I am asking when I inquire, "What is a story to you?". To his mind, it seems only natural that everyone should know what story is. He responds, "Story is story." I try again: "Why do we all enjoy a good story?". And he responds, "I have to think about that." It is not easy to put into words the nature of story and what it is that holds us to it. Yet the child knows when the story is charged with interest--or when the story is boring, flat, when the teller's voice leaves us with nothing to demand our interest. With further probing, the child responds: "Maybe, it's the sound that matters." And, "it's the pictures that are in my head that are important."

How can we understand the language of story and the literary images it creates? Lois Oppenheim addresses the image as the ontological experience. "It functions as the mind's visual counterpart of language...it reveals Being"; it is "the relation between the subject and the world."⁷ Bachelard claims in The Poetics of Space that "the image is created simultaneously with its linguistic expression and for this reason the word and the image cannot be considered independently of each other.... From the relation between thought and words, literary image is created".⁸ For the young mind, image seems not to be consciously

representational or symbolic of story form, but a fusion of subject, object, and sound giving meaning in a very personal sense--an experience of merger. Is this the aesthetic moment of story that is so difficult to capture in words? Bernard Berenson describes "the aesthetic moment" in the visual arts:

In visual art the aesthetic moment is that fluttering instant, so brief as to be almost timeless, when the spectator is at one with the work of art he is looking at, or with actuality of any kind that the spectator himself sees in terms of art, as form and colour. He ceases to be his ordinary self, and the picture or building, statue, landscape, or aesthetic actuality is no longer outside himself. The two become one entity; time and space are abolished and the spectator is possessed by one awareness.⁹

Does this also happen when the individual becomes immersed in story and/or story character?

I try to recall a recent personal encounter with story. As a pre-assignment for a course, I have been asked to read the novel, The Name of the Rose. The novel is out of place and out of time for me (the setting is a monastery in fourteenth-century Italy). But, I am part of the story. I feel with the characters and move in the suspense of the lived moments. I can alternate from character to character. I am absorbed in the reading and I do not question what is the valid sense of meaning to be found in the story. Rather, I 'live' the experience as it is in the text and as it is meaningful to me. As the reader critic, I am one with the text. The assignment is long forgotten.

Someone enters the room, but I am possessed, unaware of the external, lost in text and the story found there, and I bring it to life in me.

Later, I think through the experience. My interpretation is not neutral. When I rationalize, I understand that I have approached the text from my own point of view. In comparing my interpretation with others, varying personal orientations are unveiled. I realize that there is more than one understanding of literary texts. For Martin Heidegger, literary language is extraordinary: "literary language dissolves its author and goes on to live its own being...the literary word can be ambiguous or contradictory because Being is."¹⁰ "Literary language more than any other phenomenon "bespeaks the humanity of a people."¹¹ How, then, do children make sense of literary experience when story lines often are encountered for a first time or are out of the ordinary?

Lois Oppenheim notes that in reflecting upon story we find "the similarity between the reality described and the reality in which we live serves to provide us with a greater understanding of the 'real world'. The creation of imaginary characters and fictional events serves to instruct us on the behavior of the people we know and the adventures we experience."¹² The orientation of the reader is that of an active participant in the experience where discovery and awareness allow him/her to experience the world along with the writer in a way quite different from

that of every day or the common place. Oppenheim further explains that "through the novel, the reader is invited to interpret in a new way. This follows from the writer's desire to instruct his reader in the ways he himself has found to perceive the world."¹³ And, on a second level, the reader's perception of the world is altered as he/she participates. The gap between text and meaning is always being filled in differently so that each reading and re-reading brings something new. The meaning of literary texts surpasses the author as each interpreter brings his/her own history to the text.

I recall reading the novel, The Good-bye Summer, to a grade five/six reading class. The main character, a girl named Allie, has difficulty parting with things and people. She wants sameness as she tries to hold onto a safe, unchanging world where her belongings and her friends are huddled close to her. In the course of the story, she discovers the meaning of parting, with both things and people. At the time of the reading, the students and I just read for enjoyment or so I thought. As a teacher, I acknowledged that the boys in the group thought this was a rather 'sissy' story; but we talked about why we might each have different reactions/feelings to the story, and then moved on to new reading material. When, two months later, I told my reading group that I had resigned my teaching position, their disappointment, hurt, anger, worry was very real, and they recalled the story. I, myself, had not made

the connection--emotionally, I was moved. In a pedagogic sense, by opening story to students, I had invited them to experience Allie's life, but I was shocked at their insights and understandings as they later found deeper meaning in the text and a parallel to their own situation of having to let go.

Through imagination, reading extends our vision. Stories allow us to think about different experiences--for each, we orient ourselves according to our historical backgrounds and experiences. As teachers, we need to become sensitive to ways children experience the complexity of story. M. Hunsberger says that "teachers then are in a position of not only carrying on their own dialogue with the text, but of constantly trying to realize the nature of student-text dialogue...."¹⁴ With this knowledge comes the realization that "the text must leave space, not tell everything,"¹⁵ (nor should we as teachers).

Children know that a good story does not simply stop with the final page, but moves along with them. Additionally, they are able to invent their own stories. Story seems natural to children: they tell stories all the time. And, when a child tells a story, he/she does so with a deep sense of trust and belief.

Norman N. Holland sees entering into story as the "willing suspension of disbelief" that has underlying psychological meaning.¹⁶ But this does not completely explain how stories such as Chaucer's Canterbury Tales have

engrossed five centuries of readers. Losing the boundaries of one's self in stories is not just a psychological event: involvement with story seems to include self as well as a whole array of surroundings. Max van Manen defines this atmosphere created from story as "the way in which space is lived and experienced."¹⁷ Moreover, in the classroom, "atmosphere is also the way a teacher is present to children."¹⁸ Atmosphere has to do with sound--the sound of story--and also with silence--the quiet at the end of the story--the moment of deep reflection when we turn the last page and close the book. We know that this is a moment quite unlike the closing of a math text. When the child is truly involved in story, something special happens. The child enters the story-world, and orientations shift. The teacher/parent/storyteller also shifts orientation as he/she approaches story. What is the secret of story? Todorov says that stories play a special role for they pose great aesthetic problems: "they constitute a privileged route which I have chosen for my journey into the author's complex and fascinating universe."¹⁹ The metaphor of journey says much of the experience. "Ultimately, each reader must build a personal view and carry on his/her dialogue with the text... [Story] allows us to live in many places, to have our cottage moments and our palace moments."²⁰

C. Story as a way of teaching

Kieran Egan invites us to use story for teaching--"to keep meanings central and techniques subservient."²¹ Teachers can learn to become sensitive to the ways children experience the complexity of the elements of story and, in so doing, they can become more sensitive to the complexity of elements that contribute to the atmosphere of the school and classroom. Speaking of story as curriculum in this research is not only to talk about it as a form of communication (story as expression, story as artifact), but also as a way of teaching.

The classroom situation of this research relied upon the sharing and open communication that existed between the teacher and the students. The reading of stories and the emphasis upon communication through journal writings, retellings, and discussions established a very close relationship between students themselves and the teacher and students. Students were invited to respond to stories that crossed over into all subject areas of the curriculum. Students were not required to make journal entries, but were encouraged to do so by thoughtful and ongoing responses of the teacher. The content of journal entries was not dictated. Instead, students were asked to explain their feelings, reactions, and understandings of the readings, or retell the story in their own words. At times, concerns of the students became classroom discussion which

led students to further consider their story responses. Story became a way of teaching--a way of becoming sensitive to the complexities of the classroom and to the students themselves.

Research raised important questions about the whole teacher-student experience and the notion of curriculum as process not as content. Can we, as teachers, begin to understand how it is that we are oriented to the curriculum and how we understand the student who brings his/her own history and experiences to the classroom situation? How can we orient ourselves to invite children to share in curriculum and to try to understand the values and realities of personal life that they, as students, bring to their work in the classroom? The invitation to story addresses the notion of willingness to respond and, by responding affirmatively, being committed to share and explore the experience. How does the child orient him/herself when involved in story?

The invitation to participate in story suggests interest and involvement. It creates a different atmosphere than calling the child to some task such as gathering or accumulating facts for work completion. In the case of story the response is individual. This is not to say that all children in the classroom will respond to the same invitation at the same time. But a good story invites us--we are captured and we listen. We visit the place of the author and are changed.

Similarly, to go beyond the printed text of the curriculum guide is like going beyond the text of the story. It requires thoughtfulness. It also requires the artfulness of teaching. M. Hunsberger says that

To be artful is to invite others to participate in the creative act. And the important part of the invitation is knowing where to stop. If things are too full, there's no space to walk in. All I can do is receive.²²

Footnotes

¹Max van Manen. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 6(3). New York: John Wiley & Sons, 212.

²Ibid., 212.

³Ibid., 212.

⁴Kieran Egan. (1985). Teaching as story-telling: a non-mechanistic approach to planning teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 17(4), 398.

⁵Ibid., 399.

⁶Terry D. Johnson, & Daphne Louis. (1987). Developing a curriculum. *Literacy through Literature*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic-Tab, 151.

⁷Lois Oppenheim. (1980). *Intentionality and Intersubjectivity: a Phenomenological Study of Butor's La Modification*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 29.

⁸Ibid., 29.

⁹Norman Holland. (1968). *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. New York: Oxford University Press, 65.

¹⁰Robert R. Magliola. (1977). *Phenomenology and Literature*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press.

¹¹Ibid., 190.

¹²Lois Oppenheim. (1980). *Intentionality and Intersubjectivity: A Phenomenological Study of Butor's La Modification*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 19.

¹³Ibid., 19.

¹⁴Margaret Hunsberger. (1983, Fall). Understanding the experience of reading. *Applying Research to the Classroom*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 3.

¹⁵Ibid., 3.

¹⁶Norman Holland. (1968). *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. New York: Oxford University Press, 43.

¹⁷Max van Manen. (1986). *The Tone of Teaching*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic Educational, 36.

¹⁸Ibid., 36.

¹⁹Tzvetan Todorov. (1977). *The Poetics of Prose*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 143.

²⁰Margaret Hunsberger. (1983, Fall). Understanding the experience of reading. *Applying Research to the Classroom*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 4.

²¹Kieran Egan. (1985). Teaching as story-telling: a non-mechanistic approach to planning teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 17(4), 405

²²Margaret Hunsberger. (1983, Fall). Understanding the experience of reading. *Applying Research to the Classroom*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 3.

II. HOW CHILDREN ORGANIZE STORY

A. Story as a creative act

To be human is to create. When reading or listening to story, it is the reader's and listener's task to 'live' the experience as it is presented through the text. To understand how children make sense of story text, mentally organize the sequence of events, and create characters from the story, we must keep in mind that interpretations are not neutral and may not be exactly aligned with what the author had in mind (or, for that matter, the teacher). Rather, children's interpretations are determined by their own personal history, experience, and the points of view which they bring to the reading. In addition, during the storytelling, the reader or teller brings another dimension into the experience through emphasis, voice, and classroom tone. The creative result is a personalized form/perception of the story where the eventual meaning is a result both of understanding (in an intellectual sense) and interpretation built upon affective response.

This is especially evident in the responses recorded in the grade six students' journals. Meaning is created not as a result of some linear analysis dependent on plot line or character action. Students repeatedly draw upon a wealth of knowledge and interests to create some order

necessary for the understanding of characters and action.

Recent theories of reading have made significant contributions to the understanding of narrative. They have established the writer and the reader/listener (the audience) in relation to the text and as elements that must be taken into account. The importance of the audience is shown in student responses that are as varied as the individuals. But no matter how varied the responses, the more involved eleven and twelve-year-olds become in the story, the greater is their recall of story detail and the stronger is their sense of sequence. For example, Kari manages to catch the key elements of a short story and to capture the nature of the characters as well when she writes:

I read this book once. It was pretty good, I'll tell you how it goes...

Once there was this cat. He always slept in front of the fire. But one night the moon shone (right at the stroke of midnight) right at the looking glass and that very moment the cat leaped through the mirror and vanished.

Then a voice said to him, "You've come in the nick of time, Merlin." It was the witch. "I was afraid you might not manage it this year."

Then the cat said, "I wouldn't fail you madam."

"That's my Merlin", said the witch. "How are you making out with that adopted family?"

"As well as could be expected", said Merlin. "They have a generous hand with the fish and cream, and their hearthrug has a nice deep pile. Taken, all in all, I have no complaints"

The hag laughed. "The same old Merlin. You've always been a great one for your comforts. I was surprised though, to hear from a passing owl that you had taken a place with children. A bit of a come down, isn't it, after some of your lives?"

"I like those children", said Merlin.

"Well", she said, wiping her eyes on a cobwebby sleeve, "I don't doubt that they've discovered you have other charms and a playful nature in some respects."

Merlin said, "Yes, indeed."

And they talked for a little while longer.

Then they went for a ride on the broomstick.

The next morning Merlin was at home in front of the fire.

Compare the above response to the following one, as Brian writes in reference to the novel, The Wolves of Willoughby Chase:

I did not like this book was dumb. Because I did not understand it.

Yet, at another time, Brian aptly records his response to the novel, The Cay:

This story is about two people named Phillip and Timothy. This story took place during World War II. Phillip and Timothy get stuck on an island called the Devil's Mouth for about a half a year. When they are on the island a hurricane hits. Phillip lives but Timothy dies. Phillip is blind by himself on the island. One day a plane passed through, but later he is picked up.

Much later, I learned that this student had himself been stranded on an island for four hours when a storm came up on a fishing trip. Months into the school year, he expressed his fear, and I learned how strong his feelings and empathy were for the story characters.

Repeatedly, students' remarks show response, not as a schematic analysis, but as a thing of their own making--a looking forwards and backwards simultaneously. Ryan alludes to this in reference to the novel, Peanut Butter is

Forever:

About the story--I thought it was incredible the way the problems keep ganging up on her. Then gradually, the problems disappeared. Some way, I hope she can get out of it.

Story receivers make sense out of what is available by working for sequential and conceptual connectedness. Accuracy of recall is only a fraction of the total picture. If, as a teacher, I were to check on Brian's total comprehension of the novel, The Cay, I would probably find a lot of missing details and information as it is supplied by the author. But if, as a teacher, I were to ask if Brian understood the story, undoubtedly the answer would be 'yes'. His empathic understandings drew him into the story content. Eleven and twelve-year-olds make sense of story by being involved in the story and thereby achieving a perception of unity or wholeness. Typically, three elements seem to stand out in the students' story responses: 1) responses are not passive, but imply active involvement and a clearly defined notion of character and the character's feelings and motives; 2) the immediate response may be followed later by re-thinking of meanings and understandings (i.e., "this situation reminds me of the story..."); 3) overt response (written or verbal) may not show the full inner response.¹

As explained by Nicki, "stories need an exciting beginning, a good middle and end". Within these structural boundaries, students make use of their own feelings juxtaposed against or into story characters and actions.

Feelings of empathy or antagonism towards characters have to do with individual judgement. Maria judges the novel, The House of Sixty Fathers:

This story was excellent! I really enjoyed it. I was very touched when Tien Pao found his mother. I just felt like I was living it. I hope you read us another story as good as this one soon. Thanks.

Similarly, Ryan comments on The Message of the Mask:

My feelings about the book are that its like Granny Maka said about the ocean spirits. I feel what they are feeling. This book seems so real. As if you want to help him.

For students, stories need to make sense, visually, emotionally, and intellectually. Without any promptings, students constantly rated stories, and ratings were never random selections of numbers. Instead, they were based on overall importance of the story or message as it appeared for the individual. Furthermore, students invariably had a visual story map in their heads. Surprisingly, when asked to create the physical story map showing the setting(s) of the story in picture form, the maps looked like replications from one group to the next. According to T. Johnson, map-making involves a number of complex skills: it incorporates sequencing, helps to develop the children's comprehension of a story, highlights major rhythms of the story, develops an appreciation of the setting as well as the internal logic of the story.²

For eleven and twelve-year-olds, understanding the story becomes a sense-making activity--a creative process that ties fiction and reality together. Wolfgang Iser says

that "literature is generally regarded as fictitious writing, and, indeed, the very term *fiction* implies that the words on the page are not meant to denote any given reality in the empirical world, but are to represent something that is not given.... [However, fiction and reality are linked in that] fiction is a means of telling us something about reality."³ Out of the fictional language children seem to build the story situation and use their imagination 'to see' the events. In a typical statement given by a student, Janet writes: "I could see what was going on in my head." The encounter with story thus becomes a dynamic interaction between the story text and the story receiver. When story has meaning, students tend to grasp the individual events, become involved in the story experience, and use their personalized form of creativity in image-building. Story sequence thus unfolds, and meaning is created.

B. Storytelling and retellings

Part of the research here focuses on the use of oral story in the grade six classroom to understand how children re-create the story verbally through retellings. In retelling the story, children are involved in making a new text as novel and distinctive as the author's original version. The research focuses on children's response to story and their ability to re-construct meaning. Listening

and subsequent retellings, out of necessity, also involve learning about children's command of the spoken language and the link between reading and speaking. Research priorities centre on the understanding and significance of story to the students: this demands attention to the effect of the story, not as a measure of the amount of comprehension but as inquiry into how the student is thinking.

The listener's response here is a retelling of the story (without any prompts) in order to reveal the different ways in which the listener becomes a new author. Tappings and transcribings of retellings were used to understand how the student makes meaning out of fictional language and re-constructs the story in a language of his/her own. After listening to the story, the grade six students were encouraged to retell the story onto tape using a story or summary approach. Retellings were not prompted, so students had no cues from which to build their response. Although the environment and student-teacher relationships (mentioned earlier) also affected the research, the focus was on the students' experiences with story. How do students select, infer, and construct meaning to provide story coherence and cohesion? How are students active and creative in filling in textual gaps on multiple levels? These are the questions of this inquiry.

Teacher knowledge of the students, as established in the close relationship of a classroom, is used to better

understand the students' different approaches and retellings. J. Harste points out that "research is not only a product and a process, but an attitude."⁴ It attempts to interpret and reflect upon the relationship between theory and practice. Transcripts of story retellings and knowledge of the students are studied and interpreted while, at the same time, various language theories are placed in the context of actual practice. The overall question is: what do retellings tell us about the language learner and his/her relationship to fictional elements? But other questions also emerge. Careful study of various story re-constructions leads us to ponder many sub-questions related to the use of oral story in the intermediate classroom. For example, how do children make sense of a story that may have little or no resemblance to their daily world? How do they make the leap from possible fiction to sheer fantasy? How do children identify with characters in stories? Why, in some cases, do they remain as unattached onlookers or appear incapable of putting the story together? What kinds of meanings do children at this age seem to find in stories? Are these logical, rational, moral, affective? How do children attach meaning or develop thematic awareness?

Some of the students' retellings address these questions. Following is one such sample, a retelling of the folktale, *The Cat of Quinty*:

Once there was two kids and their father. They lived in the city and wanted to move to the country. The first year they were farming. It

was good and the second year it was the same. But the third there was a drought and it was hard to find food so the father was getting tired of looking at his hungry kids so we went out in the forest--deep in the forest--to kill some game. While he was gone, the cat would go out every night and catch a rabbit. And every night the kids and their mom would have rabbit stew. So finally when he came back the father had a deer on his shoulder. And when he got back the mother told him all the things the cat had done. He didn't believe it at first. Then after he seen the rabbit stew, he finally believed what she said.

Noticeably, this is not a poor rendition of the original, but new text as original and distinctive as the author's.⁵ The story receiver has made her own contributions to the story. In the original story, the father came back with meat for the family. In the retelling, the father "had a deer on his shoulder". From the general, the student has moved to the specific. Since the student had not been given background information regarding the history of Loyalists moving to Canada, the move in the retelling became one from city to country--an interpretation changing the context somewhat, but certainly not incorrect--an interpretation that provided logic and meaning to the student. For children, the very notion of one universally valid interpretation is untenable. Fictional text and listener converge so that the listener, when involved, fills in the missing story gaps using textual information provided and his/her own supply of background information. The story unfolds in the time and space of the fictional language but it takes shape only in the mind.

Susan retells the story with a somewhat different focus so that feeling is added to the characters:

The children nagged and nagged until their dad let them, their dad took the cat home their dad let, to let their dad take and the cat and they promised to take care of the cat. So the cat would not run away, they put butter on his feet. The...the cat...the cat was so by licking his feet that he forgot...to run away.... They put the cat in a case and stowed him. The cat howled his indignation. When they finally got.... The first two summers were really good and in the harvesting, but the third summer was really bad. The father couldn't bear to see his the cat to see the family so gruesome. So he told the family that he wouldn't he was going...he was going out to the far woods to get some animals and he would not come back until he caught some animals. Meanwhile, that night the cat went prowling around and caught a rabbit. When the family woke up this morning they didn't believe their eyes. The cat had caught a rabbit. So the cat kept on doing it all every day until the dad came home. When the dad came up he was very sad because he didn't think...he thought it might be too late because the family had not had any food. When he got there, he was shocked because he saw the stew. He, meanwhile, after the family told him he was so pleased that he hugged the cat.

Even though the young storyteller is having difficulty in story construction, she is attempting to parallel the presented story. And, in some ways, her retelling offers more than the original. The children "nag", not just "plead"; the father can't bear to see his family so "gruesome"; the father is "shocked", not just surprised; and finally, the father is so pleased that he "hugs" the cat. This story re-construction involves inferences, references, and co-references based on the personal experience that the listener brings to the text. The

listener is not attending to text construction as an end product, but rather as a construction of meaning. This is not an easy process: noticeably, the student has difficulty fitting her command of the spoken language to her understandings and recall of the story. She stumbles over crucial words, repeats words and phrases, and searches for new words, phrases and meaningful expression. And yet, the passage does constitute a reasonable retelling of the story.

In contrast, we can look at what a student more proficient in language does with these elements of cohesiveness, story weaving, and story completion:

The Cat of Quinty wasn't beautiful or clever. He had a striped coat which was quite ordinary and had black whiskers which were short. He didn't know how to do tricks and didn't, wasn't interested in stalking birds or mice and. But in one period of his life, he became a great hunter. And this story was told all around, all around by the early settlers for many years.

The Cat of Quinty belonged to a family which, whose last names were Loyalists. They came to Canada from the Mohawk Valley long ago. He didn't, he wasn't very happy when he came though. He liked the comfort of the farm and and whether he...the father and the mother weren't happy either to bring the cat along.

The father said the cat was going to be a nuisance. But the kids begged and begged and finally they got their way to bring the cat. So the mother put the cat in a basket and they took the cat with them. The cat didn't like making the journey in the basket and kept on yowling. And he got yowling until they got there. When they got there, the cat wanted to run away, but the children put butter on his paws and he spent so much time licking it off that he didn't have time to run away. The family built a log cabin and they had good crops until the crops began to die and the father couldn't stand looking at his children's

grey...grey faces anymore. So he said he was going to go out and so he went out and the mother and the children were sitting by the fire and the cat came home and beside him there was a rabbit. So the mother knew what to do. She made him into rabbit stew. So the cat always, every night brought home a rabbit and they always made it into rabbit stew. And then one day father came home and he thought he couldn't stand to look at them because he thought his family would be dead by now and he didn't come home in time. So he came home and the children were sitting around with rosy cheeks and plump faces and they were happy. And so, the children said to the father, "Aren't you glad we brought the cat?" And the father said, "Yes, we should be very grateful for this cat." So and now this legend is told from the settlers and is told now.

Not only does this listener-author tell the story, she methodically adds personality, animation and conversation. For example, the cat kept "yowling", the cat wanted to run away, and faces were getting "skinnier, and greyer and greyer everyday". It is interesting to look at what she does with the concept of Loyalists: "The cat of Quinty belonged to a family whose last names were Loyalists." Wolfgang Iser says that "it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning...the unsaid comes to life in the...[story receiver's] imagination and the said 'expands' to take on greater significance than might have been supposed."⁶ Communication in literature is both restrictive and magnifying in that whatever may be unclear or concealed spurs the receiver into the act of imagination to fill in the missing pieces.

Jason, who has difficulty with all aspects of

language, and, in particular, the written parts, retells the story with a great deal of difficulty:

This is the Cat of Quilty and it's about uh...it's about a cat that's removed and...the father goes out hunting after a year and it brings back rabbits every day and it feeds them and helps them and all that and helps them stay alive and when the father comes back he's surprised to see them that they are healthy and well fed and they tell him about the cat and he doesn't believe them and then when he grabs the children and helps them and he smells the rabbit stew and then he believes them.

Here the cohesive ties are weak. Weaving, which includes sequencing and logical relationships among story lines, is not strong. The use of language conventions such as conjunctions and phrase subordination is limited. Intonation is flat and monotonous; the student's voice shows uncertainty and concern. Is this student saying something that makes sense? Some essence of the original is retained, but many story elements necessary to demonstrate full understanding are missing. There is an inadequacy in the content itself, pronomial reference is weak, and context is insufficient to supply the full meaning. The student makes little effort to self-correct and, for the most part, he appears to be unaware of the weak causal relationships that he constructs in his story. He is unable to fit his spoken account to possible understandings that he may have picked up from the oral presentation. Yet, when I, as the teacher, check individually on his understanding, I become aware that his notion of the story sequence and content is surprisingly

greater than anticipated. As a teacher I need be aware that many factors may influence the transition of the student from an avid listener to a storyteller. Fictional language and re-construction of story is not just a matter of comprehension and recall of detail.

How much of a part does self-perception and the experiential background of the student play in the process of oral story construction? Knowledge of this student shows that he lives and plays in a limited environment where paternal authority in the home is supreme and where low self-esteem has resulted in poor peer relationships in school life. Success has been hard come by for this student. And the real world does not afford him much time to let his imagination dwell on happy moments. Kenneth S. Goodman's transactional psycholinguistic model of language development recognizes that "the level of confidence limits willingness to take risks which in turn limits inferencing."⁷ To demonstrate an understanding of story through retelling involves bringing together a whole repertoire of personal history and experiences. "Texts do not automatically imprint themselves on the reader's mind of their own accord...the way the text is received depends as much on the reader as on the text."⁸

This personalized nature of story may be more apparent by listening to Janice, a confident student who has few public inhibitions. Although the impact of a strongly oriented retelling with full intonation and clarity is lost

in transcribing, the following retelling, in its oral presentation, shows the student's confidence and control of the language. Words are emphasized for expression and to lend personality to story character. A partial transcript is sufficient to illustrate the strong, descriptive words which are used effectively in story re-construction (underlining shows verbal emphasis):

The Cat of Quinty was not a beautiful cat, nor clever. He was just quite an ordinary black cat. He did not like stalking birds...but after he became, decided to become a hunter. So he became a remarkable hunter in fact. The Cat of Quinty belonged to the Loyalist family who have moved to Canada from the Mohawk Valley. He did not come happily for he liked the comfortable farm where he lived. Nor the father of the family was happy to bring the cat. He thought he would be a nuisance. But the children of the family pleaded and pleaded to the father to bring the cat. So they did...

While one student's conceptual and experiential background is limited and confidence is low, other students such as the one above reveal diversity in grammar and risk story-making of their own. This can also be illustrated in another retelling that has incorporated the student's global knowledge and historical perspective of the world:

Once upon a time there was a cat called...or there was a cat who lived in Europe. He and the family that he belonged to was going to move to Canada but the children but the father didn't want the cat to come but the children who had to leave so much stuff behind begged and pleaded with him so that the cat could come. Finally, the father said yes that he could bring it and he and the mother found a covered basket and put the cat in it. The cat howled and howled but it still had to be left in there. When they got to Canada,

they moved to the shores of the Bay of Quinty. The first two years had gone very well. More settlers moved in and the crops were planted. In the third year, there was a great famine and the father had to go out to get food to feed the children. The cat had been..each night had been going out and hadn't been seen until morning and when he came back the next morning, he had a rabbit and the mother cooked the rabbit for the children. Each night, he...each morning, he came back with a rabbit and the father had come back. When the father got back, he was surprised to see his children were very well and when he asked how everybody was, the children told him that the cat had gotten food every night for them and the father did not believe this until he smelled the rabbit stew and he was glad that the cat had been brought along.

Certainly, the notion of story is indicated here. In addition to some students' abilities to re-construct the story and add detail, many showed understanding of story form, sequence and closure. The "once upon a time" and "they lived happily ever after" are common elements of the retellings showing that students have incorporated past knowledge of story form into their retellings. Retellings show completed ideas and form--something that the listener can make sense of. K. S. Goodman refers to this as the perceptual cycle or the brain's ability to organize the information into meaningful wholes.⁹ Wolfgang Iser's response theory outlines theme and significance as the constituents of image, and it is the use of imagery that enables story completion. The images form a sequence so that "each individual image...emerges against the background of a past image"¹⁰ producing an overall continuity. As story time advances, the receding image is

replaced by the emerging new image. Accordingly, "meaning" is the totality of what is implied by the many aspects of the text: "significance" is the listener's absorption of the meaning into his/her own existence.¹¹ This follows Derrida's theory that a "text can never be understood as an organization of elements present to themselves. Every element bears some other element in the chain--this linking *is* the text."¹²

Recent language theories have drawn the attention of research to story grammar: can text have an effect upon recall and understanding? In retelling *The Cat of Quinty*, almost all students had difficulty in expressing time and time change as it occurred in the story. They wanted to place the story in the past, but then they seemed to feel that they had to correct and tell it in the present tense. How long did the cat hunt before the father returned? Why did the students feel it was necessary to clarify this element of time even if it meant indicating time as a vague dimension (i.e., "the next few nights, the cat..."). Although the text, to some extent, governs the interaction between story and listener, story receivers seem to unconsciously undertake the task of chronological re-ordering.¹³

According to Tzvetan Todorov, narrative analysis not only involves time, but also point of view and mode. Our point of view determines how we see the events, i.e, how we construct or re-construct the story. The story is

transformed by the psyche of each individual reader. The author's account is an imaginary universe created by him; this, in turn, is worked upon by the "narratee" (the story receiver) to create a newly imagined universe based on logical and imaginative thought--a sense-making activity.¹⁴ In the legend here, the position of the author comes under question: is this a story or an account of a story? Many students tried to incorporate a more animated story form than the original fiction into their retellings.

At the micro-level (i.e., examining each individual retelling), it is clear that the story experience involves the seeking of meaning, tentative selection and construction of events/knowledge. Clearly, each storyteller tries to capture the story in his/her own words, so that the original print becomes a different text for each student. Frank Smith would say that language is related to situation and content.¹⁵ Accordingly, "meaning is not something that a reader or listener *gets from* language, but something that is *brought to* language.... [This] involves complex intellectual processes that must be actively initiated and directed by the reader [and listener]."¹⁶ This means that the story experience is more than the end product; it means that the story receiver is constantly evaluating in an attempt to place the story into a meaningful framework--a process involving both creativity and logical thought. According to Wallace Martin,

There are many kinds of stories, little agreement about which ones are best, and less

agreement about what they mean. Therefore, rather than trying to discover the formal structures on which on stories are based, ...[we] might better try to determine why and how we read stories as we do--asking not what they are in the abstract but determining what competence we intuitively exercise in reading them.¹⁷

C. Story organizers: Emergent themes

Evident in students' journals and story responses is the fact that students use various means of organizing story. Perhaps it is the semi-spectator/semi-participant role of the listener that allows for reflection, evaluation and consideration while at the same time being very much involved in the story. What emerges from students' journals is a variety of approaches to understanding the story encounter: 1) eleven and twelve-year-olds attempt to establish a coherent reality (even when that reality springs from fantasy), and it is around this reality that they organize the story elements; 2) eleven and twelve-year-olds develop the story visually around images that intertwine and collide to provide and construct an overall notion of tension or conflict; 3) eleven and twelve-year-olds use images created from plot and action to make sense of the particulars, and hence derive a sense of unity and coherence; 4) students organize story around their personal values using their abilities to evaluate

actions and interpret situations and characters; 5) upon recognizing theme for a story, children will organize and arrange events and understandings around it.

1) Establishing coherent reality

Referring to the The Cay, Ryan says:

It was a good book because it sounds so real: the problems and situations could happen in real life. Characters act and seem real.

Later on, Ryan demonstrates what he means as he responds to The House of Sixty Fathers:

As they rushed up the river current, they just had to get away. Away from the Japanese. Then they stopped. They stopped at a place called Hengyang, safe for now. We all got off the sampan.

Suddenly, ratatat gun fire. We went to hide. Our sampan was left afloat.

Establishing coherence here is subsumed in the student's shift in orientation as he seems to unconsciously move from spectator to active participant. Response is not passive. Even with no direct personal experience to draw upon, he can empathize and show deep understanding of story character and action.

When the novel involves real people and realistic situations, we may not be surprised that students can readily organize and connect the parts and become one with the characters. But the movement through fantasy involves more. The Secret of NIMH introduces us to a mini-world of rodents

and animals quite capable of behaving in human ways. Kari shows her capacity to suspend the normal sense of reality:

I really enjoyed the story. It taught me a lot about mice and rats. I didn't know rats and mice were so creative like they made houses and tools and elevators. I know a lot of it probably isn't true, but it all seemed so real.

The author describes the story and every part of the story. It's so real to me. I feel like I'm right there with the mice living out in the garden and rosebushes and trees. I really like it.

Similarly, Jane writes of the same story:

I thought it was an excellent book where something was always happening. The only thing that I wish I knew what happens to Justin. The thing that makes it different is that this is a story about cats mice and rats. That they can talk, read, write and a lot of other things. The author puts the rats and mice in a human-like situation. I can imagine humans having this problem so it makes it more realistic.

Ryan shows an even deeper understanding that touches on the irony of rodents behaving in human ways, and then, in turn, having to cope with problems caused by humans:

My response to the story is I think it is really original. I like it because these aren't stupid little rodents, what draws this story to me is that they have very kind and intelligent personalities. The rats of NIMH are a very good idea to make, whoever wrote this is an excellent writer. I also get involved because these mice have problems and they are caused by humans.

Although the story is factually impossible, the children clarify reality by identifying human personalities. It is almost as if they know the characters so well that they are capable of dialoguing with them: they are real people.

Tanis says:

I like happy endings. So do the characters.

2) The notion of tension or conflict

Kieran Egan reminds us that "most teachers of young children learn in their professional preparation that children's active manipulation of concrete objects should precede abstract or symbolic learning. It is a commonplace of such programs that in planning teaching we should begin with familiar knowledge and experiences and expand gradually outward towards new material.... If we accept the principle that children's learning progresses from the concrete to the abstract, how do we deal with fantasy stories?"¹⁸ Kieran Egan theorizes that children structure story on the relationships of underlying concepts such as conflicts of fear/hope, kindness/cruelty, good/bad¹⁹--these concepts are abstract, but without them the concrete actions of the story are meaningless.

Indeed, students' responses illustrate that, in understanding story, getting the central notion of conflict is essential to establish story line. (It may be argued that establishing the war between such abstracts as good/bad and honest/dishonest is but an extension of a concrete experience; but, at least, as teachers, we may accept Egan's challenge, allowing that not all abstract

concepts are difficult for children--that, in fact, "children understand such concepts so profoundly that they understand with them: they use them to make sense of new knowledge."²⁰) The students' retellings examined earlier show that students organize the story tensions by picking up bits and pieces, until suddenly they see connections and the story becomes complete.

The role of tension in story is nicely documented in Jaime's journal. Here, in responding to E. Reid's novel, The Message of the Mask, tensions, both abstract and concrete, are intertwined, but the basic understanding is structured around good/bad, happy/sad times:

My exact feelings for the story doesn't come in a paragraph. Since my feelings don't fill a paragraph form, it is not very easy to put it in one. In the story (which is not quite done), I feel sadness for Scott and Jake but also understanding for leaving the person you love and letting go the person you love is not easy. The Blairs are tense and wondering--I also understand that. Dan and Gran would be very sad to see Scott go--taken by the spirits away from the river. All in all, this book (so far) has had happy times and sad time. For in which everyone has to go through feeling for how hard it is to make decisions. I think the message is about doing the right thing and leaving the people you love. It's on making the right decision thinking about other people. You can't buy friendship or love.

Through written story response, Jonathan consciously recognizes the interplay between good and bad in the novel, King of the Wind, as he tries to sort out his own conflicting reactions:

To tell the truth, I have never read any stories about horses. But the idea of the good against the bad was a different idea, but I didn't like it. I enjoyed the novel but I think there were too many problems. I wanted Sham to run in the big race and I didn't like the part about Sham dying. Other than that and the lady in the Red Lion Inn I liked the story.

A short entry from Maurice's journal also points out children's delight in the extreme and discovery of limits:

I liked this story because it was an adventure and I pictured myself in that situation. I would try to save someone but I would also be frightened to fall down with him. I would like to hear a lot more of these stories.

There is an interplay between memories of the story text, new expectations and the present image.

Following Kieran Egan "we [might] consider a little further how we progressively apply our abstract organizing categories to making fuller sense of experience, [and] we might even further reject the known-to-unknown principle. One common procedure we see at work in children's learning is the dialectical process of forming binary opposites and mediating between them."²¹ Perhaps it is the abstract qualities of good and bad in the above example that are the known, and children use them to make sense of the unknown content.²² No matter which way we view the thinking of children, we need to recognize that they have well-developed capabilities for handling logical and affective tasks simultaneously. Eleven and twelve-year-old children's imaginative capacities of reaching beyond the immediate experience to put the experience in some reasonable perspective are, perhaps, not all that different

from adults' (a thought quite contradictory to widely accepted notions of Piagetian theory on child development). Kieran Egan says the most obvious structural device in children's dealing with story is the use of abstract, binary opposites: for them the story moves along these structural lines. Binary opposites, in their abstraction, have the power to help children to gain a sense of story. They are "powerful fixers of context."²³

3) Plot and action: images

Other "powerful fixers of context" that emerge from story are the images created in the listener's or reader's mind. After listening to the short story, *The Truce of the Forest Fire*, Kari has some vivid recollections of the animals and people trying to escape:

It is not a book I would normally take out of the library. But if I didn't hear this story I think I would be missing out. I liked the part when they were trapped. It was exciting but the part when the bear led them to safety was even better.

Or we can consider the journal entry of Jennifer in reference to the explosion of Mount Vesuvius in one of the short stories:

...the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius was filled with crashing. First a sharp cracking like a monstrous snapping of twigs, then a roar like a whole forest of fires....

But not all images come in concrete pictorial form. At the end of the school year, students' recall of stories showed that impressions or images somewhat abstract in

nature lingered on. Metaphors are used not just to understand fantasy, but also to provide imagery in the realistic story. Karen recalls:

Scott's parents died when he was very young. Scott had a friend named Dan. Scott's heart was like a map of Canada. The parts he had seen were all lit up. The parts he had not seen were waiting to be lit up.

As a story progressed, it was apparent in students' journals that images also progressed, changing and expanding until plot and action came together. Imagination allows children to move forward and backward through the story. According to Wolfgang Iser, images have "a hybrid character...at one moment they are pictorial and at another they are semantic."²⁴ Bachelard claims in The Poetics of Space that "the image is created simultaneously with the linguistic expression and for this reason the word and the image cannot be considered independently of each other."²⁵ Literary image is the relation between thought and words, and for children to transfer the pictorial to word is not always an easy process.

4) Applying personal values

Understanding story is a process of selection, prediction, and finding causality. Putting it all together for eleven and twelve-year-olds involves applying personal values to evaluate actions and interpret situations and

characters. Previously learned values, affective response, and self-reflection are evident in students' story responses. Applying personal values seems to bring a certain satisfaction--a justification of feelings about events and characters, and an awareness of "Who am I?". A sampling of these responses follows:

Terri comments on Peanut Butter is Forever:

I think Terez is too bossy and orders people around too much. I think Michelle should tell the truth about her and Klutzy because if she doesn't, she's worse than her sister.

Mila comments on Peanut Butter is Forever:

Mitch should have been friends with Klutzy at the first because they both cared about each other. They shouldn't have let that go to waste. I think Mitch was stupid to copy Klutzy's poem. I'm glad they became friends in the end.

Mila also comments on the story poem, Gorilla, Gorilla:

I think it is a good story. I don't think people have the right to take animals away from their homes. I think the author understands how animals feel. I thought that the gorilla is cute. I would never treat an animal that mean. I think that people who capture animals don't have feelings for them.

5) Identifying theme

Personal values help children come to understand story, but so, too does direct identification of theme. Using theme as an organizing structure, children fill in expectations and clarify obscure aspects of the story text. Recognizing theme takes the listener beyond the text--often

to recognize something of significance to himself so that personal values are not excluded. Two of the grade six students record these responses to Peanut Butter is Forever:

I liked the part where Mitch saves Klutzy from being thrown into her locker. It showed me that friends won't turn against you.

You shouldn't judge people by their looks. Just because Klutzy wasn't as pretty as the other girls in the school, she was a lot nicer. At the beginning of the story Klutzy had real greasy hair. At the end of the story, she fixed her hair and wore nail polish and felt better about herself. Mitch had stopped being friends with Klutzy because her mom told her to. She didn't want her daughter to be known as a klutz too but Klutzy and Mitch became friends later on. Their friendship should stick like peanut butter.

At a 1988 fiction/poetry reading, a young aspiring Saskatchewan writer, Rick Hillis, told his student audience that "writing begins in real experience"--writing is language--"one sentence at a time". It also is "something that grabs at your heart...and rolls like a stone going downhill". At this same reading, Lois Simmie noted that "fiction is strange--you live through something--it changes you--you can't really remember what actually happened--the edges get blurred--but from this story emerges". These are authors' notions of story construction--but student experiences with story seem not too different. For students, certain approaches seem to dominate when re-constructing story, so that the images tug at inner feelings, blur and re-shape, and live on in the listener's

mind.

Anyone who has listened to Tom Sawyer will recall the opening few lines and the resultant images:

"Tom!"

No answer.

"Tom!"

No answer.

"What's wrong with that boy, I wonder?"

You TOM!"

No answer.

The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room; then she put them up and looked out under them. She seldom or never looked *through* them for so small a thing as a boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for "style", not service--she could have seen through a pair of stove lids just as well. She looked perplexed for a moment, and then said, not fiercely but still loud enough for the furniture to hear:

"Well, I lay if I get hold of you I'll---"

She did not finish, for by this time she was bending down and punching under the bed with the broom, and so she needed breath to punctuate the punches with. She resurrected nothing but the cat.

"I never did see the beat of that boy!"

She went to the open door and stood in it and looked out among the tomato vines and "jimpson" weeds that constituted the garden. No Tom. So she lifted up her voice at an angle calculated for distance and shouted:

"Y-o-u-u Tom!"

There was a slight noise behind her and she turned...

Our attention is fixed. As story participants and observers, we set up our own sense of coherence. Suspense holds us with the tension of the old lady in her non-productive but vigorous search for Tom. We guess as to the possible beginnings even before the story takes place. We guess from the immediate action and the long-range atmosphere to the tone and plot of the novel. We know

immediately that if we are to identify with one of the characters, it will be Tom. The author's presence is quietly beneath the text, setting up story tensions that enable the listener/reader to take sides according to personal values. Eleven and twelve-year-old children are also capable of establishing these values and picking up on theme within the first few lines of a well-written story. Setting becomes more than time and place; it becomes atmosphere and involves recognizing story tensions and themes. Story text takes on a life of its own.

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are: efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.²⁶

The following chart summarizes the themes just described:

Response to Literature: Children's Approaches to
Understanding story

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. establishing a sense of realism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -empathizing with characters -drawing on personal experience -acknowledging the presence of author |
| 2. use of images to set up story tensions/conflicts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -through storytelling and retellings, students organize the tensions, confusions of the story experience -use of binary opposites: problematic notions of child's use of the concrete and abstract -listener's tension between detachment and involvement -tension between retrospection and anticipation |
| 3. use of images to establish plot and action--making sense of the particulars to derive a sense of unity and coherence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -prediction, foreshadowing, guessing suspense -establishing affective causality -being selective: "something that grabs at the heart" -awareness of author |
| 4. use of personal values--evaluating actions and interpreting situation and characters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -affective response -self-reflection -addressing the question "Who am I?" |
| 5. recognizing theme--reflecting on significance of events and character behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -expectations -filling in gaps of story -going beyond the text -recognizing the implied author |

Footnotes

¹D. W. Harding. (1968). Response to literature: The report of the study group. *Response to Literature*. James R. Squire (Ed.). Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 11.

²Terry D. Johnson, & Dapne R. Louis. (1987). Story Maps. *Literacy through Literature*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic-Tab, 69.

³Wolfgang Iser. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 53.

⁴Jerome C. Harste et al. (1984). *Language Stories and Literacy Lessons*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Education Books, 222.

⁵Of course, the author's text can only be known to him. What we end up comparing is the student's retelling and each new perception of the story text. When we read or listen to the surface text in search of story and interpret significant aspects of the story, a new text is born--as a result of the personal history of literacy that we bring to the process.

⁶Wolfgang Iser. (1980). Interaction between the text and reader. *The Reader in the Text*. S. Suleiman & I. Crossman (Ed.) Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 111.

⁷Kenneth S. Goodman. (1985). *Transactional Psycholinguistics Model: Unity in Reading*. International Reading Association, 828.

⁸Wolfgang Iser. (1974). Phenomenology of Reading. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 107.

⁹Kenneth S. Goodman. (1985). *Transactional Psycholinguistics Model: Unity in Reading*. International Reading Association, 836.

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¹⁴*Ibid.*, 69-72.

¹⁵Frank Smith. (1979). *Reading without Nonsense*. Teachers College.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷Wallace Martin. (1986). *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 27.

¹⁸Kieran Egan. *Teaching as Story Telling: An Alternative Approach to Teaching and Curriculum in the Elementary School*. Burnaby, B.C.: Simon Fraser University, 9-10.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

²¹*Ibid.*, 19.

²²*Ibid.*, 20.

²³Kieran Egan. (1983). Children's path to reality from fantasy: Contrary thoughts about curriculum foundations. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15(4), 369.

²⁴Wolfgang Iser. (1974). *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 147.

²⁵Robert R. Magliola. (1977). *Phenomenology and Literature*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 29.

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III. THE EXPERIENCE OF STORY THAT ATTRACTS/INVOLVES US

A. Exploring the magic of the world of story

This chapter attempts to understand how well-crafted story attracts and involves children. Children come to school as experienced story tellers. And, in the elementary grades, when children formally begin to encounter language, story is the most common way of ordering experience. M. Spencer says that in listening to and creating stories, children seem to "have both the 'virtual' experience of the characters and the actions...and the literary experience of telling [and listening]."

If we can begin to understand how and why children find pleasure and meaning in story text and experiences, we may be less inclined to devote our attention to the surface structures of language and pay more attention to the differentiations made by the learner in these encounters with language. What is it that invites one to learn (or to story)? Not all people are attracted by the same invitation, and so for teachers, there is need for keen insight into when a student is accepting the invitation or being drawn into an experience, whether it be story or any other form of learning. Using Idrenne Lim-Alparaque's terminology, these are "moments of gathering" which grow into "a new creation"--into a story that has never been

told.²

What are the pleasures of the world of story? For Robert Frost, it was important to make a poetic clearing in the forest--a meaningful landscape.³ What is this place where people poetize and experience "moments of gathering"--moments where story creates opportunities to think in a "remembering and anticipating" way?⁴

Dr. T. Aoki notes that:

There is something magical and mystical about story. I have a feeling that it is at a deeper level, a mystery, a place of time and not of time.

A teacher, Jan Hockin, comments on her son's experience with mythology:

In taking the reluctant reader to myth, something magical happens that takes the reader in. There's something inside these pages that happens inside of him. The story allows him to make real sense out of the unknown as opposed to losing touch with reality.

We often remind ourselves and children that "It's only a story"--but some unknown seems to exist as

Children flicker in and out of two realities, the imaginary and the practical. Their stories take shape from the base of their everyday familiar experiences. From these grounds of practical experiencing storying accomodates their thinking, feeling, and languaging within the matrix of new meanings made accessible through the filter of old meanings. Their storying does not stray far from the arena of casual daily experiencing.⁵

Northrop Frye says,

The literary work is a true wonder. It exists and lives and works on us, it enriches our lives to an extraordinary degree, it gives up hours of delight and it allows us to descend into the very depths of existence.⁶

Human existence forces questions--fundamental ontological questions of 'why me?': story allows us to come to these questions. For T. Mullins,

Story-making seems to be an indigenous activity of the human person as reflexive and essential an activity as breathing...the major part of our lives is pervaded by stories...we dream in narrative... In order to live we make up stories about ourselves, about the personal as well as the social past and future...story is universal and pervasive.⁷

Art, especially literature, is a great hall of reflection where everything under the sun can be considered and reflected.⁸

P. Ricoeur says "[story] texts speak of possible world[s] and of possible ways of orienting oneself."⁹ These are worlds that disclose possible modes of being--symbolic dimensions of our being-in-the-world.

B. Experiential themes in the students' responses

1) Being stimulated by story

Story is stimulating: it spurs the reader/listener to mental activity. Confronted with a decision-making conflict in the novel, The Message of the Mask, Blake records in his journal:

If I were Scott, I would say 'no' I don't want

to go with you. I've got very good friends here. I especially like Jake because he's like my father. If I lived in America, I would be American and I'm really Canadian. And I like it here because it's bush. If I moved to Seattle, I would no longer be a bush boy.

Similarly, John hypothesizes in his response to the dilemma and action of The Cay:

I liked this story because it was an adventure and I pictured myself in that situation. I would try to save someone but I would also be frightened to fall down with him.

Story, here, allows the student to leave the every day--to move from imaginary content to real content, to have new insights, to probe the questions of "Who am I?" and "How do I feel about this?". Coming to terms with affective meaning is part of the satisfaction derived from story. Kieran Egan points out that plot, as "a pervasive and determining force in a story...does not lie simply in the sequence of events, but rather in *how* the sequence *stimulates* a sequence of emotions."¹⁰ Jen says:

Something that makes up story is the way people are. How their feelings make the story interesting. The way it is written. You can see it. I know when a story that is being told to me is good because I can see what is happening. I picture it.

The story experience stimulates the imagination and enlarges the experience by providing a safe place and distance to hypothesize, sympathize and understand predicaments and characters. When given choice of story follow-up activities, children repeatedly choose to write

their own sequel, to convert the story into a local newspaper headline, and to dramatize their version of 'the next act'.

Story has special impact when the listener/reader is allowed to figure it out, to discover the subtle and the unspoken, to fill in the "missing gaps". Impressions come from discovering connections which make vivid both meaning and imagery. "All sense impressions must be reenacted in the inner sense, by means of productive imagination, in order to endow them with continuity."¹¹

Trying to understand death, Thomas writes:

The part I liked but was sad was when he slept beside Timothy. Then I realized that he [Timothy] was dead. I was depressed. Then Stew Cat came up to him and he started to cry. He was blind also.

Image here is not just a pictorial representation.

Rather, it is "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."¹² Similarly, plot is the affective sequence of meaning, and it becomes the logical order for the student subsumed in the feelings of the moment.

The power of plot is closely tied to character. When students lose themselves in the reality of the imagined world, characters appear to dictate the plot. In the short story, *Luke Baldwin's Vow*, a boy and an old farm dog establish a relationship of love and trust that permeates all actions in the story:

When they came out of the brush, they would

lie together on the cool grassy bank with Luke talking earnestly, while the collie, as Luke believed, smiled...

[Later, Luke overhears his *practical* uncle telling Aunt Helen:]

"The plain fact is the old dog isn't worth his keep anymore and it's time we got rid of him."

"It's always so hard to know how to get rid of a dog, Henry." [Aunt Helen replies.]

"I was thinking about it the other day. Some people think it's best to shoot a dog. I haven't had any shells for that shotgun for over a year. Poisoning is a hard death for a dog. Maybe drowning is the easiest and quickest way. Well I'll speak to one of the mill hands and have him look after it."¹³

Students seem to become very intimate with the story characters, and it is this intimacy that enriches the plot. M. Spencer says that "the student's knowledge is involved in that he/she knows either more or less than the characters about what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen next."¹⁴

2) Experiencing suspense in story

Suspense in story is that which attracts and binds the listener/teller to the plot. Kari describes a good story as one in which,

Everything fits into place; you can't put it down. Stories need suspense to grab the reader's attention. The next chapter keeps a story going--that and your curiosity.

When listening to a story, students constantly project what will happen next. They guess, using their notion of

what is logical and they react accordingly to the story. Sometimes this guessing is a straight-forward process seemingly controlled and dictated by the author. An excerpt from the novel, Fog Magic, shows how story suspense is set up:

She stepped to the side of the road. Who could possibly be driving on the Old Road? And where had such horses come from? Surely there were none in the village or in the town thirty kilometres away capable of holding a steady pace up the mountain. She could only peer down along the dim road she had come and wait.¹⁵

Straight-forward suspense, such as this, usually leads the students to a clear-cut and satisfying resolution of story. But, at times, students react negatively to story when their sense of what is right seems to be violated. For example, the novel, King of the Wind, left a number of students disheartened. The main characters, both horse and stable boy, through a series of misfortunes, grow old and miss their opportunity in life. Sham's fame as an Arabian race horse is realized only second-hand in the colts he sires, but never from his own speed. For students, who had waited for the 'big race day'--for Sham and Agba to claim their glory--there is only disappointment. Although the students said that this was an interesting story, the romance and idealism of the novel was somewhat tinged when their expectations were not met.

In the short story, *Red Shoes*, by Lois Simmie, the listener/reader waits with Meg and Carson for their parents to return from a holiday meant to patch up a shaky

marriage. Not knowing how the parents' trip is progressing, we follow Meg in her intuitive fear and hopeful anticipation, waiting both for their return and the presents they have promised to bring:

And then, late one night, [Meg] woke up to the sound of her father's voice downstairs. She listened, straining her ears, until she heard her mother laugh. Carson's running footsteps passed her door and pattered down the stairs. She wanted to go, too, but a strange shyness prevented her...

Then they were coming up the stairs, lamplight spilling ahead of them, were in the room, bending over her bed, smiling and talking in low tones...

[Carson's present was a dress] in an exotic blue bag with PENNY'S on the side.... It was blue as a blue bird's wing with an enormous full frill and a long sash that tied behind...

"Open your shoes, Meg. Try them on." Carson was jumping up and down on the bed now, flickering the flame in the lamp chimney.

Meg folded the tissue paper back and lifted out one gleaming red shoe...

"Try them on, try them on." Carson, whirling the skirt over Meg's head like an immense blue parasol.

..."Perfect", her mother said.... It looked, felt, it even *smelled* beautiful.... Her mother unfastened the buckles on the other shoe and Meg took it, started to put it on.

No. Oh, No.

She squeezed her eyes shut. PleaseGodpleaseGodpleaseGod Almighty FatherSon and Holy Ghost please make it not true. The shoes were both for the same foot.

...Late the next day Meg limped barefoot toward the barn, carrying the shovel and the shoebox...

She was still thinking of the shoes, wondering how long it would be before she would have to dig them up again, try to make them fit.

[And Meg knew when she heard them fighting again.]¹⁶

Suspense does not always depend upon a mysterious or fierce sequence of events. Rather, the plot here is one

of subtleties, irony and metaphor. It is only our intimate knowledge of Meg that alerts us to the dreaded hopelessness of the situation. Here, the story is a metaphor finding expression in the symbolic red shoes that bring heartache and despair. At its greatest, the story is a metaphor of life. Thomas M. Leitch describes one of the rules of classical narrative as being the "rule of suspense". "Although a story's development (and perhaps its resolution) should be implied by the state of affairs which is first displayed, they should not be predicted in every particular."¹⁷ For the eleven and twelve-year-old listener, the desired 'happily ever after' outcome does not happen. Suspense in the story depends upon the promise-to-be fulfilled (both the parents' and the author's); and it comes from anticipation and knowing the desires of the characters. For the listening audience, there is a dual pull--the desire to know what happens next, but also the need to maintain some distance so as not to suffer all with the characters. This tension is obvious in Janet's response:

If I could have jumped in and changed and controlled the action, I would have.

Upon seeing the National Film Board version of Simmie's story, with an altered and happier ending, students expressed a greater sense of satisfaction, but the original unhappy ending still lingered. Story does not always end with the last line of text.

Suspense in story seems to wind inward as the story actions become squeezed tighter and tighter together. Initially, conflict is set up; we get to know the characters, some more intimately than others; and our expectations are aroused. The continuity of the story keeps us turning the pages. The next chapter/turn of events keeps the story moving. T. Mullins says, "we live in a continuum of moments--a series of successive 'nows'."¹⁸ Story requires us to organize chaotic experience and it spurs our curiosity by demanding that we know what comes next. Story can be broken off. It can be continued in unanticipated directions. But the listener stays attentive in his/her quest for resolution. According to R. Tabbert, "literary works can evoke and then frustrate the reader's expectations gradually changing his/her frame of reference."¹⁹ The subtle unexplained gaps of the story arouse our curiosity and require some mental contribution on the part of the receiver.

Suspense in a story is often in the form of a strong feeling of necessity. Students' responses to the story poem, Gorilla Gorilla, demonstrate immediate concerns for the safety of the silverback, as well as larger concerns for man's lack of respect for the environment and its inhabitants. Suspense here depends upon strong bonds of the story audience and the captured gorilla:

It had been an uneasy day,
a close, heavy day
that waited for rain.

The great silverback had led his group
 deep among the trees for the night.

The young one felt lonely
 and disturbed that evening.

He built his nest on the ground
 to be closer to the others.

He was awakened abruptly
 jolted from deep in his sleep
 by the blood-tingling scream
 of the great silverback.

At the same time
 he felt something dense,
 yet light,

fall down about him.

Rain?

A web of frozen air?

A net!

...

[The gorilla] pounded his big chest
 in fury and fear; he grasped

the bars of the cage

and shook them in his powerful hands

The enemy net was still caught across his shoulders

"He's a beauty", said one hunter to the other

...

From somewhere

deep in the forest

the silverback screamed his warning

over and over.²⁰

More than one type of suspense seems to be at work here. The story poem involves violent physical action. And students express feeling this intense danger for the gorilla. We usually think of this kind of suspense according to M. H. Abrams' definition: "As plot progresses, it arouses various expectations in the audience or reader about the future course of events. An anxious uncertainty about what is going to happen, especially to those characters with whom we have established bonds of sympathy."²¹ But, there is another kind of suspense bound up in the story that is important. It has to do with the discrepancy between desired action and the actual action.

It also has to do with the audience's unconscious engagement in text and structure in waiting for formal completion. E. S. Rabkin calls this "subliminal suspense."²²

No matter what the level of suspense, plot seems to be the controlling factor. K. Lever says that plot is "the soul of the novel."²³ And, perhaps plot, as it is bound to story character(s) and the affective response of audience, is the backbone of suspense. According to T. Leitch, "stories [and their respective plots] do not necessarily promise...that conflicts will be definitely resolved or the truth manifested once and for all; they promise only that something further will happen, or that there is something else to learn."²⁴ Suspense as a key element of story is a state of mind: for eleven and twelve-year-old story listeners, this seems to be the soul of narrative.

3) Being allowed freedom in story

The attraction of story for children is very much bound up in the freedom that story allows. Story provides an imaginary world in which children can explore their ideas and feelings and through which they can experience new ways of life. Unless story comes too painfully close to a real stressful situation, students have few inhibitions about reacting to and participating in it.

Even though the story has a plot of its own, students feel free to enter in: "children's stories, those they hear and read, and those they make, move both in the *here-now* of understanding and the *there-then* of projection. They may mix 'fact and fiction' and move back and forth among categories."²⁵ Story allows children to leave the everyday, to participate in possible worlds without risk, to discover how they feel about different situations involving tension and conflict--while remaining quite safe and personally unthreatened.

Story listeners are attracted into the world of story characters: characters are distinct individuals who children know and understand. When involved in a story, children are intimately in touch with the character's thinking and feelings. Angela explores the character's situation in the novel, The Message of the Mask, when she records in her journal:

Dan is a nice, kind person, but he is hurting inside. The reason is because these people have come to take his best friend away from him and he is scared. I know if I was Dan I would feel the same way. Like a part of me is being taken away. I think Dan has every right to be mad at the Blairs.

Similarly, Carrie shows that students are attracted by the fears and feelings of the characters. Responding to the short story, *The Dog of Pompeii*, she says:

When you learn about Mount Vesuvius, you feel like you're with Tito because he can't see so he doesn't know where he's going. You want to let him be safe so you just want to be by his side.

Students live vicariously in the world of the characters. As they are attracted into this world, they are challenged to consider the decisions and judgements that will affect the destiny of the characters.

Wolfgang Iser names the involvement or entanglement in story as the "present ness of the text...[and] when we are present in an event something happens to us. The more 'present' the text is to us, the more our habitual selves--at least for the duration of the reading--recede into the past."²⁶ In story, we are more in the characters' world than our own. Not only do we recognize the familiar based upon our past experiences and expectations, but we enter the text and often return with new insights and understandings. Furthermore, the more there is to be learned from the story, the better and more intriguing it seems to be for children. Kieran Egan says that "one attraction of stories is that they grant us satisfaction, which our experience and history withhold from us, of being sure how to feel about events and characters."²⁷

Following imaginary characters seems to teach us how people behave. Part of the lure of story lies in its promise that we will be able to piece together the story and meanings, to travel into another world and return with fresh insights. Allowing the reader/listener this opportunity of mental exploration is especially important for children. It allows the young adult to immerse him/herself in emotional response and to sort through these

emotions. This is especially important for adolescents as they begin to form their own view of life and identify with characters they admire. "Children learn in the same way as scientists testing tentative modifications of their theories of the world through experiments."²⁸ Story provides this possibility without the physical trial and error of direct experience. And it is soon obvious when story does not fulfill these expectations. When there is nothing in the experience for them to learn, children do not stay in the situation for long.

Each story presents a certain perspective on the world and on life, and the listener/reader's task is to sort out the moral dimension as well as the puzzle of events. For example, Thomas writes:

I thought The Cay was the best story I have heard. I don't know what I would have done if I were Phillip. The one thing I didn't like is the fact that Phillip was blind. I didn't like that because they couldn't tell what grabbed him when he went in the hole and he couldn't see what he was doing. Was this a true story?

The complexity of story causes excitement and pleasure when children unravel its mysteries. Ironically, story has a larger-than-life dimension while, at the same time, it reduces reality to a scale that is a mini-version of life--a place that allows us to make judgements and decisions without having to bear the immediate consequences first hand. And, this is particularly important for young adolescents who are in the process of forming their own

values to carry through life.

Living through new experiences in story, a special bonding occurs between the teller, the listener, and the tale.²⁸ Idrenne Lim-Alparaque calls the first stage of "gathering" a story "resonance" or "listening for enjoyment, to bask in the experience, [to] be drawn into the drama."²⁹ "Reverberation" is "interaction with the experience". And, "recognition" is the "process of stepping back from the experience to appreciate and understand the meaning."³⁰ In school, it is the teacher's responsibility to allow children to discover and express their understandings, to occasionally set aside known worlds and explore others. For K. Lever, "to be cut off from my own world and involved in another is interesting and pleasant."³¹ Story allows the satisfaction of pure play and imaginative exploration, and it expands the possibilities of self-expression and communication. Story moves us because it is believable and because it involves us in new experience. In addition,

Stories as figurative versions of the world tacitly remind us with each reading that while we do suspend disbelief for our own pleasure, we also grow by aspiring and reconciling, and that out of these processes we discern an order apparently our own yet immediately grasped by those around us if we can only find the means in language or action to convey it.... Its purpose is not to make us laugh--though it may do so--but to make us see.³²

4) Being drawn into the language of story

The language of story holds its own special attraction for eleven and twelve-year-olds. Students are very much aware of the skillful hand that goes into writing story. Rick Hillis, a Saskatchewan writer, (mentioned earlier) says that "writing is language", "one sentence at a time". "It grabs your heart." Grade six students know that language can be very important to a good story. Terri writes:

My reaction to a *A Boy and a Mountain* is that it was great. It had lots of words that grabbed you. Almost pulled you right into the story. I liked the part where he pulled out the man and then, surprised, he said, "You're Captain Winter." He sounded like he was proud of himself for saving someone so famous.

Referring to the same story, Jane comments on how "the author made you feel like you were there. Like when he said how he dug his feet into the ground. You felt it too." Student response made frequent mention of the impact of strong descriptive language. The author of *The Dog of Pompeii* "makes you feel what the eruption was like. He said hot rock and ash were falling everywhere. They were hitting everyone and burning their skin putting them in agony. The author makes it sound like you're running alongside Tito as he attempts to escape the volcano." Story language takes the listener into the situation imaginatively.

Story writing involves a special kind of language.

The writer often "constructs" it not for use (as in giving directions, convincing, explaining), but for satisfaction--his own and his audience's. This kind of language comes closest to poetry, and at times, it is poetry. For example, R.C. O'Brien's novel, The Secret of NIMH, is rich in poetic language--language that draws our attention into the smallest corners of a mouse world. From a safe and comfortable distance, Mrs. Frisby, the mother mouse, watches as the farmer transforms her winter home into garden:

Behind the plow, in the moist and shining soil, the rudely upturned red-brown earthworms writhed in a frenzy to rebury themselves; hopping along each furrow a flock of spring robins tried to catch them before they slid from sight. And when the plowing was done and the worms had all disappeared, either eaten or safely underground, Mr. Fitzgibbon came back with the harrow, breaking down the furrows, and turning them all up again. It was a good day for the robins.³³

Literary language in good story is rich and it provides pleasure in sound, rhythm and tone. "The rhetoric of literature is highly particularized language and is far removed from talk, yet children accept it without batting an eyelid."³⁴ It interprets the world, but leaves space for the listener to imagine, to use his natural senses in feeling the story motions, and to bridge the gap between the real and unreal. Jacqueline knows that The Secret of NIMH "was not as real as some of the other stories, but the author helps you get into the story. The story is enchanting because the author is able to describe so well

that you get involved." Literary language controls the beauty of the work and prepares us for the next event. The language may be fanciful, but it is apparently authentic.

Children attempt to adopt the literary forms of language they learn from story. From the stories they create, we can see how they reproduce story form. Ryan begins his story called "Space Adventure" like this:

One day when I was outside, a spaceship came down in the school yard. The hatch opened, a half-human, half-alien figure stood at the doorway.

He said, "Who wants to go for a ride?"

I said immediately, "I will."

I went to the hatch and looked around. There were dials and switches all over. The hatch closed...

Story writing here shows a beginning awareness of story construction. This student knows that stories often begin with the conventional "one day" or "once upon a time" opening line. Using dialogue satisfies the writer's desire for advancing action. A short abrupt sentence is intended to set the tone for surprise and mystery. Language must hold the audience if the story is to be strong, and children are early aware of this.

Yet children themselves are not always expert story tellers; they sometimes wander and digress as their imagination leads them astray. But they can appreciate the subtle qualities of well-crafted story language. Eleven and twelve-year-olds particularly enjoy the cleverness of a writer in using puns, ambiguities, ironies, and double meanings. It is as if there is a special confidence placed

in the audience's ability to catch these subtleties--a sort of extra bit of private communication between the author and the reader/listener. Story language can be "loaded", and detecting all the meanings brings a special satisfaction to bind together the teller, text and listener.

Returning for a moment to The Secret of NIMH, we can look at the language of story as it involves many shades of meanings. The Rats of NIMH have no high opinion of Dragon, the cat. Even, Billy, the farm boy says, "I never saw such a lazy cat. He gets worse everyday." But the listener/reader knows much more than this surface text allows. The rats have, in fact, drugged poor Dragon, again, in order to slip by him into the farm house. But danger always exists. What if Dragon should wake and live up to his ironical name? We can never quite be sure. Later, Mrs. Frisby does sneak past Dragon and into the farm kitchen to overhear a very important conversation. There are plans to exterminate the rats, and she hurries to tell Justin. He responds quite strangely:

"You know," he said, "I had a feeling the first time I clapped eyes on you that you'd bring us good luck."

"*Good* luck!" She was amazed.

"Oh, it's bad news. It's serious. We'll have to change our plans, and quickly. But think how much worse it would be if you hadn't overheard it. We wouldn't have had a chance."³⁵

Students easily follow the dialogue of the story, knowing that the strange ambiguity of the situation must

change the course of events to follow. This story is "different, it's more make-believe; but you get involved because the author lets you hear how the characters talk."

Yet the story is not just a dialogue between the story characters. It is also dialogue between the listener and the text. There is an interchange between the text's message and the active listener in seeking out meaning: text and context merge as interpretations are formed and continually modified according to past experience, change in events, and emotional reaction. "In literature children can interact with the communicative possibilities of language and sense personally the experience of humanity outside of their own time and place."³⁶

C. The aesthetic experience

A child's encounter with story and the language of story does not follow the basic traditional linguistic formula showing communication as a process of speaking and encoding into message, listening/receiving, and decoding. Children who listen to oral story are involved in much more. The experience does involve active listening and individual interpretation. But there is also something quite exceptional involved in listening to a story as opposed to listening to a lecture. Louise M. Rosenblatt makes a useful distinction between "non-aesthetic reading"

and "aesthetic reading."³⁷ Although the two kinds of reading are not mutually exclusive, her distinction helps to clarify the position of the involved story listener. "In non-aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is focused primarily on what will remain as residue after the reading--the information to be acquired, the logical solution to the problem, the actions to be carried out."³⁸ In aesthetic reading, in contrast, the reader's primary concern is with what happens during the actual reading event. "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text."³⁹ Listening to story seems to fall within the realm of this kind of reading.

Although we may hope to find new experience in story, we do not consciously approach story in order to arrive at new knowledge and understandings. Rather, children and adults seem to be attracted to story for the immediacy of the lived moments offered by the text--to be absorbed in lives outside our ordinary world. The pleasure of story comes directly from intense, personal involvement of thought and feeling. This often involves some degree of distancing ourselves from reality (even if the story is a version of real life). What is real and what is not real often becomes blurry. L. Rosenblatt says, "literature especially invites confusion about its relation with reality."⁴⁰

What happens in the mind of the young story listener?

Through the language of story, the listener responds by visualizing certain images. The listener is engaged in finding and maintaining meaning as the story progresses. Both the emotion and the intellect are engaged: the consummate experience is a product of both, and it may bring about a sense of fulfillment or frustration, depending upon the state of mind and the circumstances at that particular moment. When the story experience is particularly touching--when it is felt in total--it can offer more than ordinary life. This might be termed the aesthetic moment. Because the experience is all-encompassing, it is not possible to separate form from content, or story text from context.

Moreover, the aesthetic moment involves students' sensitivities. And when students move into exciting and new worlds through story, there is a pervasive atmosphere in the classroom. For the teacher who has read a 'moving' story to a classroom of students, there is a feeling that goes beyond recorded response. Students, who may have been drawing as a secondary activity while listening to the story, tend to stop, to wait, to listen and to follow the story from the climax to the final word. There is a strange silence in the room. Even with the last word of the text, often no one cares to talk for a moment or two--absorbed in the story and slowly drawing back to the ordinary world. Roland Barthes identifies the "pleasure of reading"⁴¹ as a result of two edges: 1) the language of

literature as established by schooling, good usage, and culture; (Here, text is not based on the sentence, but often "it is powerful gush of words, a ribbon of infra-language."⁴²) and 2) an excitation ("bliss") that blurs the individual elements of language so that the reader/listener finds significance or an "unveiling of the truth."⁴³ This type of satisfaction is not found at the level of the structure of languages, but at the moment of their consumption or realization--when the story takes on significance for the individual.

It is difficult to say exactly what goes on in the minds of eleven and twelve-year-olds at this time, but it is a sensuous experience allowing the whole of the story to 'sink in'--to come into a private focus--to take on significance. There is a synthesis of what the listener knows and feels and what the story offers. Roland Barthes says: "What I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface."⁴⁴ The experience is not found solely in the language or the temporality of the reading/listening moment. Aesthetic experience depends upon the individual's flow of sympathies and requires involved participation so that the listener arrives at some realization or personal understanding of the story. At the moment, at least, this realization is vivid and penetrating. And it may go beyond the social and structural functioning of the story text to move the

receiver to a quiet pleasure/ecstasy. The story text may not be real or realistic, but its significance is genuine, and children approach this experience quite seriously. Perhaps the mystique of story rests in its potential to stir us beyond the ordinary. The story text can communicate a strange condition. It can allow the receiver to relate the story experiences to the pleasures of life and to find significance on an individual basis. The aesthetic experience depends upon the signified value found in the text. The listener or reader enters the private scenes of the story and confronts the dialectics of the story conflict to arrive at his/her own understanding and realization. In the teaching world, story can be made available to the students. In Louise M. Rosenblatt's words, good teaching springs from the

The teacher who himself possesses a keen awareness of the world about him [and] will to seek to develop as fully as possible the student's sensuous endowment and to help him get from literature and life the greatest measure of enjoyment of sound and color and rhythm. But as the student looks more closely at the world of sight and sound, he will also come to distinguish their effect upon his own moods. He will come to notice dominant impressions, to see certain patterns in events, to sense the clues to the state of mind of other people. Sensuous details will gain significance as they lead him to glimpse the emotional undercurrents that flow so swiftly beneath the surface of life.⁴⁵

Footnotes

¹Margaret Spencer. (1976-1977, Winter). The place of literature in literacy: 'Dip a finger into Fafnir'. *The English Quarterly*, 9(4), 7.

²Idrenne Lim-Alparaque. (1986). *Storying: The Child's Articulation of Experience through Imagination*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

³Edward Connery Lathem. (Ed.). (1975). In the Clearing. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 410-470.

⁴Idrenne Lim-Alparaque. (1986). *Storying: The Child's Articulation of Experience through Imagination*. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

⁵Ibid., 130.

⁶N. Frye. (1963). *The Educated Imagination*. Toronto: CBC Publications, 373.

⁷Thomas G. Mullins. (n.d.). *They Asked for a Story.....* Cork: University College, Education Department, 1.

⁸Iris Murdoch. (1978). *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. Oxford University Press.

⁹Paul Ricoeur. (1976). *Interpretation Theory*. Fort Worth: Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 88.

¹⁰Kieran Egan. (1978). What is plot? *New Literary History*. The University of Virginia, 470.

¹¹John Carlos Rowe. (1984). *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 203.

¹²R. Wellek, & A. Warren. (Eds.). (1942). *Theory of Literature*. New York: Harcourt & Brace, 192.

¹³Morley Callaghan. (1978). Luke Baldwin's Vow. *One Potato, Two Potato*. J. R. Booth (Ed.). Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 293.

¹⁴K. Lever. (1961). *The Novel and the Reader*. London: Methuen, 83.

¹⁵Julia Sauer. (1978). Fog magic. *One Potato, Two Potato*. J. R. Booth (Ed.) Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 211,

¹⁶Lois Simmie. (1984). Red shoes. *Pictures*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 28-33.

¹⁷Thomas M. Leitch. (1986). *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*. London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 116.

¹⁸Thomas G. Mullins. (n.d.). *They Asked for a Story.....* Cork: University College, Education Department, 2.

¹⁹R. Tabbert. (1979). The impact of children's books: Cases and concepts. Part 1. *Children's Literature in Education*, 10(2), 94.

²⁰Carol Fenner. (1973). *Gorilla Gorilla*. New York: Random House.

²¹M. H. Abrams. (1962). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 70.

²²Eric S. Rabkin. (1973). *Narrative Suspense*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 69.

²³K. Lever. (1961). *The Novel and the Reader*. London: Methuen, 78.

²⁴Thomas M. Leitch. (1986). *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*. London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 122.

²⁵James Squire (Ed.). (1968). Gleanings. *Response to Literature*. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 67.

²⁶Wolfgang Iser. (1974). Grasping a text. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 131.

²⁷Kieran Egan. (1983). Children's path to reality from fantasy: Contrary thoughts about curriculum foundations. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15(4), 365.

²⁸Frank Smith. (1979). *Reading without Nonsense*. Teacher's College, 91.

²⁹Idrenne Lim-Alparaque. (1986). *Storying: The Child's Articulation of Experience Through Imagination*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Alberta, 53.

³⁰Idrenne Lim-Alparaque. (1986). *Storying: The Child's Articulation of Experience Through Imagination*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Alberta, 54-55.

³¹K. Lever. (1961). *The Novel and the Reader*. London: Methuen, 59.

³²Michael Lasser. (1977, March). The story world. *Journal of Reading*, 459.

³³Robert O'Brien. (1980). *The Secret of NIMH*. New York: Atheneum, 243.

³⁴Margaret Spencer. (1976-77, Winter). The place of literature in literacy: 'Dip a finger into Fafnir'. *The English Quarterly*, 9(4), 5.

³⁵Robert O'Brien. (1980). *The Secret of NIMH*. New York: Atheneum, 212-213.

³⁶Marjorie P. Shumaker. (1975, October). Literature and the teaching of reading. *Language Arts*, 52(7), 953.

³⁷Louise M. Rosenblatt. (1978). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 23-27.

³⁸Ibid., 23.

³⁹Ibid., 24.

⁴⁰Ibid., 35.

⁴¹Roland Barthes. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang.

⁴²Ibid., 7.

⁴³Ibid., 10.

⁴⁴Ibid., 11-12.

⁴⁵Louise M. Rosenblatt. (1938). *Literature as Exploration*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 61.

IV. ORAL STORY AS DIALOGUE

A. Aesthetic communication

The aesthetic experience of story rests in its potential to stir the listening audience--to communicate something of significance through the language of discourse. M. Schumaker says, "in literature, children can interact with the communicative possibilities of language and sense personally the experience of humanity outside their own time and place."¹ Literature calls for participation. Active listening to a story is giving oneself to the reading--dialoguing with the text. We talk about characters and situations in fiction as if they were real: literature and, in particular, oral story is not an escape from life but an entering into it.

Returning to the notion of aesthetics, literary language, in some ways, approaches the kind of communication and presentation found in other arts. Karen, a language arts teacher, says:

Literature is an experience; we can talk about it as a form of communication, as expression, as artifact. It is not discontinuous with other experiences or forms or art.

For young adults in the classroom setting, the effect of the story text seems more important than the intended meaning. Viewed in light of this, a story text may not be all that different from other more visual art forms. Just

as paintings do not need to be captioned or to be graphically explained for meaning, neither does the language of stories. Story language communicates varied and individual meaning to each listener or reader. In fact, the language of story relies heavily upon the reader's/listener's communication with the text or the telling so that both the spoken (written) and silent (implied) parts have a powerful effect upon the audience. In stories, as in other arts, some forms of expression need not be explicit. Silence can be just as powerful as lavish poetic language.

B. Story speaks to its audience

The artist (author) assumes much of his audience in granting that the reader/listener will understand the unspoken and be able to read between the lines.

Merleau-Ponty says that

The novelist speaks to his reader.... He assumes that what he has to say is known. He dwells in the character's behavior and gives the reader only a glimpse of it, a nervous preemptory trace which it leaves on its surroundings. If he is a writer, that is, if he knows how to find the ellipses, elisions, and caesuras of conduct, the reader will respond to his appeal and meet him at the center of the imaginary world he animates and rules.²

Oral story in the classroom becomes dynamic in that a dialogue situation is established whereby the listener poses mental questions and seeks answers in the story text.

Children constantly ask 'Why?', even if they know there is no definite answer. Jill says, "I like the story better as I learn things--the questions in my head are answered in the story." For story to take on individual significance, this kind of involvement is necessary. Entering into story and participating in an imaginary way are of equal importance to listening and reflecting upon the meaning.

Thomas M. Leitch outlines three skills required for good narrative: 1) the ability to defer one's desire for gratification; 2) the ability to supply connections among the materials a story presents; 3) the ability to perceive discursive events as significantly related to the point of a given story or sequence.³ Perhaps the fourth skill is the skill of mental dialogue--the ability to meet the text--to feel that we are involved in implicit conversation with the characters and to feel that the writer is addressing us. For eleven and twelve-year-old children, this kind of involvement is very much a part of the story experience. Children have little difficulty in taking over for characters with whom they identify: they can act out the parts or step in and create new lines of narrative. Yet they are not forgetful of the fact that the author lurks somewhere not too distant from the narrator and story text. For example, Tara comments on the story poem, *Gorilla, Gorilla*:

The person who wrote this story knew a lot about gorillas and liked gorillas a lot. *Gorilla, Gorilla* tells how the animal feels and how the author feels. The author put a lot of

effort into the story. There is a basic line running throughout the poem telling us to care for our animals and environment. What happened to Gorilla Gorilla?

"We bring story into being by posing and answering questions (even if unconsciously) about what we read."⁴ In longer stories, "the novelist communicates his insight into the meaning of life and his belief in the powers that be"⁵ as he creates an illusion of reality and invites the reader/listener to participate. A story becomes tellable and coherent when the telling invites the audience's perception by filling in the missing gaps--exclusions that are partially, but not totally, defined by the context. The center of interest here is somewhere between the reader and the text: story is more than a "hierarchy of sedimented layers of meaning"⁶ found in the sequence of events and the personalities of the characters. "The presence of the speaker [teller] and hearer constitutes the language as communication."⁷ Even though the listener does not literally reply to the writer or teller, he/she meditates on the story text and relates to it reciprocally.

A passage from The Secret of NIMH shows how the author communicates with his young audience, inviting them to ponder, consider, reflect, and seek answers as the mouse mother, Mrs. Frisby, explores the activities of her neighbours:

They were rats.

There were a dozen of them, and at first she could not quite see what they were up to. Then she saw something moving, between them and

behind them. It looked like a thick piece of rope, a long piece, maybe twenty feet. No, it was stiffer than rope. It was electric cable, the heavy, black kind used for outdoor wiring and strung on telephone poles. The rats were hauling it laboriously through the grass, inching it along in the direction of a very large wild rosebush in the far corner of the yard...

But what would the rats want with such a long piece of wire? Mrs. Frisby could not imagine. Even more curious, how did they dare to pull it across the yard in broad daylight when the cat was right there? The rats were bigger than Mrs. Frisby, and could be, when necessary, dangerous fighters, but they were no match for Dragon [the cat].⁸

Story language here is an imitation of ordinary speech--talk addressed to the implied reader/listener. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is without reference to any real situation, but rather depends upon the illusion of reality. Yet, for all intents and purposes, story language communicates to the audience and presupposes responses and questions that will arise in the mind of the reader or listener. For W. Iser, story language "provides instructions for building a situation and for production of an imaginary object."⁹ Additionally, it quietly seeks response from and communicates with those dwelling in the story text. Story language has the authenticity of talk. Children's books especially seem to develop real communication between author and audience.

C. Dialoguing on story text and the listening experience

Using oral story in the classroom is a way of furthering any initial dialogue set up by the story text. It seems natural for children to extend their listening experience by clarifying their responses and seeking more information. During classroom discussion time, children make an active contribution to the meaning of the story text. Text takes on life when it is realized by the individual, and discussion allows children to reflect and identify the significance of a given story on a very individual basis. Through open discussion, the student can compare his/her response to that of others: the imaginative response becomes an articulated response going beyond the private level of the story experience. L. Foreman-Peck suggests that "it is through such talk that students are enabled to develop a framework of personally significant concepts with which to develop their reading."¹⁰ This is a step away from "being in the story world" to being able to reflect upon it. It requires a second thoughtful look.

This kind of dialogue becomes an event linking the written text to hearing and speaking. It is also linked to the children's own writing of story response found in their journals. Indeed, journals take on a conversational tone, questioning, responding in communication with the teacher. Through journal writing, the children often answer their

own uncertainties, as they come to terms with their concerns.

Inviting the student to respond intimately and spontaneously to oral story depends upon a good relationship between teacher and students in the classroom. In some ways, a story is not a genre like other genres of art; story depends upon tone and atmosphere--both that written into the text and the setting of the reading. On the part of the writer, K. Lever notes that "attitude towards characters and action must be emotionally and intellectually right if I am to lose myself in his world. When a novelist sneers at what I consider true or praises extravagantly what I consider ordinary, the disparity between what is written and the manner of the writing forces me to be aware of the writer. Only when the tone is just right do I forget that I am reading and enter imaginatively into the world of the novel."¹¹ Tone, as defined by R. Magliola, is "the reflection in the story of the author's attitude toward his material and toward his audience."¹²

On the part of the teacher, sound of voice, inflections and gestures are part of the telling. "Atmosphere, then, is a constituent (among others) of what we...[call] the experiential world."¹³ Atmosphere is the whole pervasive experience of listening. It encompasses the internal dialogue that goes on within the listener.

Listening is the silent part of story. Of listening,

Sheila Moore, an educational administrator, says:

If we were to develop standardized tests with age and grade equivalents, we would be measuring only the minutest part of what listening truly is. A listener is curious, selective, courteous, accurate, and tolerant and understanding. If you were to say that these are not listening skills but life itself, you'd be right.

We listen for all kinds of reasons: to obtain information, to understand instructions, to detect differences, to better argue our point, to relax, and so on. At times, we wish to prolong the experience; at times, to shorten or terminate it. Selectivity is our human ability to be picky--to choose what we wish to hear. Often, with discursive text, we read/listen to acquire the facts. Prolonging the experience is necessary only in that we add something new or achieve our purpose. With stories, the experience is different. When a story is good, we wish to prolong it. This is especially true for children caught between wanting resolution of the story's problems, but not not wanting the story itself to end. Hence the request, "Read it again", and the success of trilogies/series that allow the story to continue and the characters to live on. R. Detweiler points out the difference between scientific work and literary work:

Scientific work provides knowledge separate from the work itself, whereas the literary work provides the basis for aesthetic experience.¹⁴

Similarly, Margaret Hunsberger says:

The scientific knowledge exists apart from the language in which it is couched, the literary

work does not. To lift information out of a scientific report does not change the information, provided it is stated accurately. And the information is usually the meat of the report. But what can be taken out of a literary work? What is removed is decontextualized, therefore altered.¹⁵

In story, the verbal structure communicates for its own sake--not for facts. Consider the dialogue Robert Service establishes with his listener in the story poem, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, as the narrator-character recounts his final duties to his frozen comrade:

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I
lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I
heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace
roared--such a blaze you seldom see;
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and
I stuffed in Sam McGee.¹⁶

It is little wonder that students are directly involved and caught up in the cremation of Sam McGee. Because of their dialogical nature, stories can rant and rave. Through the voices of the narrator and the characters, the author speaks to his audience.

D. Dialogue with story characters

Often the author recedes into the background and the story is a dialogue between the fictional characters and the audience. In the short story, *Luke Baldwin's Vow*, in addition to the narrator's comments, we get to listen in to Luke's private thoughts (a kind of internal monologue) as

he contemplates how to keep his old dog from being put to sleep:

...Luke was frightened, for he knew what his uncle was like. He knew that if his uncle decided that the dog was useless and that it was sane and sensible to get rid of it, he would not be moved from his plan. Luke knew this in his heart. All he could do, he thought, was keep the dog away from his uncle, keep him out of the house, feed him when his Uncle Henry wasn't around.¹⁷

Communication of this sort brings the reader/listener close to the story character. It creates a sense of being there, of knowing real people and sharing their concerns. According to Wallace Martin, there is another kind of dialogue found in narratives other than that included in quotation marks. It is found in "implicit conversation with the characters--sympathizing with them or adding ironic overtones to what they say [and think]."¹⁸

In journal responses, students repeatedly indicated a real sense of knowing story characters--sometimes unconsciously writing and speaking as if they were the characters and, at times, expressing a desire to talk directly to the story characters. Such dialogue opens up the literary work.

E. Interpretation begins where dialogue leaves off
off

The kind of dialogue and communication set up in story can be quite subtle. Later, in the story, *Luke Baldwin's*

Vow, children understand what is only hinted at in written words:

The old man was smoking the cigar; the dog,
with a rope around its neck, sat contentedly
beside him, his tongue going out in a friendly
lick at the hand holding the rope.¹⁹

Although Luke's uncle says very little in this short story, children know exactly what is going on. No one needs to tell the student why Luke's uncle has the old dog tied up and no one needs to point out the irony of the dog licking the hand of a man about to kill him because he is no longer useful.²⁰ Children know exactly how Luke's uncle should/would talk. In response to the film version of the story, students expressed an awareness that the character was not speaking the way he should be. Kari says, "The characters and voices are not the same as the story you read to us." Children have a real notion of how their story characters should behave and speak. The ease of moving into dramatizations is but one demonstration of this understanding and being in touch. Children can go beyond repeating and replicating the speech of characters. They begin new text following their interpretation of the original. Interpretation begins where dialogue leaves off.

A story is communication. It selectively recruits its listeners. And, not all children will respond equally. For example, only some will want to begin a deeper communication when they encounter Greta in the novel, Fog Magic:

From the time she was a baby in the cradle,

Greta loved the fog. Every soul in the little fishing village at the foot of the mountain had learned to accept fog. It was part of their life. They knew that for weeks on end they must live within its circle. But they did not pretend to like the fog.

We sense that in story making (from the author's perspective) there is a whole area of knowing prior to discourse. Construction rests in the reader/listener is building an individual interpretation. It involves selecting and making connections. It involves grasping for meaning and personal relevance. Because the author's intention is not always within our immediate reach, we dialogue with the text and guess at its meaning. There is always the risk of misunderstanding and the potential for multiple interpretations. Interpretation is individual. Furthermore, W. Iser says

The reader's communication with the text is a dynamic process of self-correction, as he formulates significations which he must continually modify...it involves feedback of effects and information through a sequence of changing situational frames; smaller units progressively merge into bigger ones, so that meaning gathers meaning in a kind of snowballing process.²¹

Footnotes

¹Marjorie P. Shumaker. (1975, October). Literature and the teaching of reading. *Language Arts*, 52(7), 953.

²Maurice Merleau-Ponty. (1973). *The Prose of the World*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 89.

³Thomas M. Leitch. (1986). *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*. London: The Pennsylvania State University Park, 34.

⁴Wallace Martin. (1986). *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 152.

⁵K. Lever. (1961). *The Novel and the Reader*. London: Methuen, 78-79.

⁶W. Iser. (1974). In reference to Norman Holland. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 38.

⁷P. Ricoeur. (1976). *Interpretation Theory*. Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 14.

⁸Robert O'Brien. (1980). *The Secret of NIMH*. New York: Atheneum, 38-39.

⁹Wolfgang Iser. (1974). *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 64.

¹⁰Lorraine Foreman-Peck. (1985). Evaluating children's talk about literature: A theoretical perspective. *Children's Literature in Education*, 16(4), 210.

¹¹K. Lever. (1961). *The Novel and the Reader*. London: Methuen, 68.

¹²Robert R. Magliola. (1977). *Phenomenology and Literary*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 47.

¹³Ibid., 47.

¹⁴R. Detweiler. (1978). *Story, Sign and Self*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 34.

¹⁵Margaret Hunsberger. (1983). *The Encounter Between Reader and Text*. Edmonton: University of Alberta, 229.

¹⁶Robert Service. (1957). The cremation of Sam McGee. *Story Poems*. Louis Untermeyer (Ed.). New York: Washington Square Press, 324.

¹⁷Morley Callaghan. (1978). Luke Baldwin's Vow. *One Potato, Two Potato*. J.R. Booth (Ed.). Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 293-294.

¹⁸Wallace Martin. (1986). *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 152.

¹⁹Morley Callaghan. (1978). Luke Baldwin's Vow. *One Potato, Two Potato*. J. R. Booth (Ed.). Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 295.

²⁰Note: Communication in literature is the "restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit is brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves." in Wolfgang Iser. (1974). *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 111.

²¹Wolfgang Iser. (1974). *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 67.

V. MULTIPLE UNDERSTANDINGS OF STORY

For man, to make story is to entertain; the teller entertains himself as he entertains his listener. In other words, the emotional impulse to make story drives toward the principle of pleasure. At best, good story does what it does while pleurably seducing both teller and listener out of their world and into its own and, again at its best, this seduction may both illuminate the world in which the teller and listener actually are and often be the more pleasurable as the seduction becomes less immediate: story worth pondering is story doubly enjoyed.¹

A. Constructing meaning as subjective experience

Good story seduces both teller and listener. Good story is worth pondering, for it offers much in meaning. The encounter with story is an encounter with action that reveals being. Story characters may be finite, but in reading and listening to story, we externalize them so that their actions and struggles reach out and live beyond the text and story time. Actions define the story, leaving space for the story receiver to interpret the doing in a very subjective context. Children, especially, use story action to predict and anticipate the next event.

Responding to the short story, *Little Foot*, students typically mentioned the impact of action in following and understanding the story line. Jennifer records in her journal, "It had lots of action and kept us going because we didn't know what Little Foot was until Jake Mooney went

up to the cave." Similarly, Ryan says, "The story had lots of action and while listening to it, I felt like I really knew Jake Mooney and the Sasquatch. In the end, it shocked me to think that Jake had died."

Although the students followed the same text in listening to the story and encountered the same story actions, the understandings that emerged were quite different. Jennifer says, "I liked reading this story: it was about loving and caring for wild life." From a different perspective, Ryan recounts a segment of the story to illustrate his understanding:

In his letter, Jake said, "Little Foot is not harmful, he's just different, and for that people want to kill him."

As students' interests and values vary, so do their understandings of the story. The subjective nature of story involves the listener's past experiences, interests, sensibilities, insights, purposes, judgements, values. Unlike theory, principles and other forms of discursive writing, stories depend heavily upon imagining and the nature of the individual reader/listener. Multiple understandings are a result of selectivity, imagination, memory, relation to the author/narrator, relation to the characters, and relation to reality--interpretation is a product of all these. Consequently, story is neither finite nor fixed in meaning. The same story re-read, or read to a different audience, brings about different responses. Good story aims at the subjective experience

and is rich in interpretations.

A novel [or story] is great if one critique--even a very good one--does not exhaust its meaning. A novel is great if one critic after another finds a new view to explore.²

B. The listener interprets the story text

Even in silently reading a story, we are, in a sense, listening (albeit to ourselves as the readers). Reading aloud to a classroom of children adds to the experience in that it involves a shared atmosphere, and is influenced by the teacher's approach to reading the story. However, story interpretation still depends upon the individual for as Wallace Martin reminds us "readers themselves are the most obvious source of interpretative diversity, since each one brings to narratives a different set of experiences and expectations."³ This diversity can be found in the story responses provided by ten children recorded after listening to the short story, *Just Merrill*:

- The main message is that to be happy you don't have to be popular. You just have to have good friends who like you as you are.

- Sometimes people are good at things you don't even know. You just don't judge someone by their first appearance.

- You should show people what you can do or you will never be able to do what you would like to do (like Merrill). Only her family knew that she could play the flute, but when she tried, she got to be head flute player for the school band.

- Everyone is good at some thing.

- Even if Merrill wasn't in 'the group', she needed to have faith in what she did.
- You need friends in life.
- Instead of trying to be someone else, just be what you are, and try to be everything you can be.
- The story is about calling people names.
- People express themselves in different ways and nobody is a nobody.
- Sometimes things are not as important as we make them out to be.

Although students were not asked for theme, their interpretations of the story tended to focus on the overall meaning and message as they found it in the story. Mentally, the students put together the various threads of the story to arrive at a logical explanation for what happened to the story character, Merrill. When asked to explain their interpretations, the students invariably related the message to some aspect of their own lives. For example, one student recounted how important friends were to him; another knew first-hand what it felt like to be called names. Meaning was constructed on an individual level, while background knowledge and experience allowed the student to interpret something of significance to him/herself.

Each student brings his/her own point of view to the story. This 'vision' of the events includes both what is observed in the course of the story, as well as an attitude towards what is happening. Thomas G. Mullins tells us that

The experience of story...observed from various perspectives is seen as revelatory; it points to meaning, it humanizes inner worlds, it preserves us as individuals...[it is a search for the] elusive self.⁴

Reader-response theorists imply that there is no simple way to describe the individual involved in story text. For Wallace Martin,

To be absorbed in reading is to be forgetful of the daily self, drifting toward imaginary identification with characters, or veering away toward a view of their fate. To a second reading of the text I may bring a different mood, and certainly bring an awareness of what will happen next, with the result that a different "I" reads, seeing new patterns. What remains constant, within and between readers, is a collection of habits and conventions mobilized in the act of reading, and these are the cumulative product of our experience with literature.⁵

And, unfortunately, children who have had little contact with relevant and personally intriguing story experiences have a limited collection of these habits and conventions. They do not expect stories to be relevant to their lives.⁶ By the time they reach young adulthood, they have shied away from the story world, relying on reading only as a way of attaining necessary information.

C. Text and meaning

What part does the story text play in meanings gathered from the reading and listening experience? Does the text ultimately dictate how we interpret a story? Does the text

constrain the perception of the story receiver?

Story texts often rely upon divergence from the ordinary. Things typically go wrong and deviate from the good, the easy, the simple, the right, the normal course of action. Story "recounts a struggle. It is *agon* (Gr., contest, struggle)--the root of 'agony'."7 Story requires us to establish our own position in relation to the divergences of the story actions. In attending to story detail and conflict, we (at least partially) suspend or give up our own ideas and partake in the emotions and actions of the story characters. In this sense, we are led along by the text. Although the reader/listener is invited to live in the experiences found in the story, some constraints are placed upon the subjectivity of the experience. These constraints preserve a common ground for each new receiver of the story. Constraints reside in the logic of the text and in a subtle guiding by the author as creator of the text.

In Jean George's novel, My Side of the Mountain, we may not think it is a wise idea for the young Sam Gribbley to leave his home in New York City to live alone in the remote Catskill Mountains. But, when Sam recounts in detail his experiences and his struggle to survive in the wilderness, we are quite happily dragged along in a series of adventures. The text, as a revelation of Sam's thinking, influences our perception of the story events and Sam's

initial decision:

You know in those first days, I just never planned right. I had the beginnings of a home but not a bite to eat, and I had worked so hard that I could hardly move forward to find that bite. Furthermore it was discouraging to feed that body of mine. It was never satisfied, and gathering food for it took time and got it hungrier. Trying to get a place to rest took time and got it more tired, and I really felt I was going in circles and wondered how primitive man ever had enough time and energy to stop hunting food and start thinking about fire and tools.⁸

The text here invites the listener to feel Sam's agony--his struggle for food and his disappointment in a never-satisfied body--a body that feels like a foreign enemy holding him at ransom for food. Even this is a subjective interpretation, but in understanding Sam's experiences, we are not left entirely on our own. Built into the text is the author's style and suggested feelings.

Later in the story, Sam recounts:

One of the gasping joys of summer was my daily bath in the spring. It was cold water, I never stayed long, but it woke me up and started the day with a vengeance.⁹

And, occasionally, the text slips in imagery to provide the back drop for Sam's strange home:

The chickadees, like the people on Third Avenue, had their favorite routes to and from the best food supplies. ...they would chatter and call good night and make a big fuss before they parted, and then the forest would be as quiet as the apartment house on Third Avenue when all the kids were off the street and the parents had said their last words to each other and everyone had gone to their own little hole.¹⁰

Even without knowing Third Avenue, New York, students

in listening are exposed to new worlds--that of the wilderness in comparison to the urban setting. For many children, both settings are alien; and it is this alien-ness of text that requires active interpretation.

Text makes it possible to imagine--to see and hear the sights and sounds of Sam's remote home juxtaposed against a huge city. D. Thompson says, "the experience of life that literature provides enables a child to digest new thoughts, take in new feelings and accept new attitudes...to test [new knowledge] against our own sense of experience."¹¹

D. Authority of the author and his co-partner,
the narrator

Of course, text resides in the hands of its creator, the story author. As we progress through the story, similar images, events and actions are repeated. In My Side of the Mountain this repetition produces a meaningful pattern by which we establish a picture of a young adventurer learning to live in harmony with the wilderness. Interpretation is not simply a product of our emotional reactions and value judgements. The author, by establishing the text, is one source of meaning. As the writer, he is both reader and interpreter, posing and answering questions in pursuit of his own entertainment and, hopefully, that of the implied audience. As creator of the text, he controls the unwritten implications,

ambiguities of the text, and the characters who, in their turn, interpret the events in which they are involved. W. Iser says "the author 'nudges' the reader [and the story audience] unknowingly at times, into making the 'right discoveries'."¹² In writing story, the author defines his audience: through careful writing and re-writing, he slips in his own ideas of courage/cowardice, honesty/hypocrisy, fairness/injustice, and so on.

In addition, by using characters, the author has some control over the perceptions of the reader/listener. If not through the guidance of the author, how else do we feel empathy for the bad guy, for accepting socially condemned actions, and for making allowances for characters who make the wrong decisions?

In the course of story experiences, characters are important in defining the meaning of the story. Meaning is often the result of the reader/listener identifying with the character(s). This is even true in fantasy. For example, prior to reading fantasy novels involving mice characters, Shane indicated his hatred for mice as "useless and abhorrent creatures"--and he "was not going to have anything to do with listening to "stupid mice stories". Yet, ironically, this same student was totally absorbed in the "mouse novels", The Secret of NIMH and Mice at Centre Ice.

In Mice at Centre Ice, Benny, the main character, is a mouse who captains the MHL (Mouse Hockey League). Hockey

is Benny's life. A scene taken out of context of the novel sounds ridiculous; but eleven and twelve-year-olds, especially boys, know the seriousness of a game of shinny and playing for The Cup; and they followed the story events, not just with humor, but in the tension and agony of the story characters.

"Who's got the puck?" Benny asked. He glared at them. "Where is that piece of licorice stick we used for the last game?"

Peppy shifted from one foot to the other.

"I think Peppy has something to tell you", said Figaro.

"Well, out with it", Benny demanded.

"I ate it", Peppy said miserably. He stared down at the ice and chipped at it with his stick. "I was hungry this morning."

"Ate the puck!" screamed Benny the Bullet. "Have you no respect!"¹³

For students who play hockey, these mice players act and speak true to the real game. Identifying with the characters--even mice characters--is not a great difficulty. Even Shane's dislike for mice disappeared as he became involved in the story text. To truly experience this story world, it was necessary for him to transform his own ideas and attitudes: identifying with the characters allowed him the privilege of stepping into this fantasy world.

Eleven and twelve-year-old children find little difficulty in interpreting the story situation when they identify with the characters. Students demonstrated this

in taking on the character of Tom, a radio reporter who has been given strange information regarding the death of Jake Mooney in the Sasquatch story, *Little Foot*. Karie writes her version of the news broadcast:

Today, a man named Jake Mooney was shot by some men who were out hunting for what they thought to be a Sasquatch. Jake was trying to block the men from shooting it when someone shot Jake by accident. No one has reported anything further about this so-called Sasquatch. This is Tom Gideon on a flash news report.

And Andrea writes:

(Tom on the air)

I got a letter from a man, Jake Mooney--the most amazing letter I've ever seen. He found a Sasquatch on the beach and started coming back day after day to see it. Soon they were best friends. One day a bunch of fishermen saw him. They came up to the beach with rifles ready to kill him. Jake Mooney did not die accidentally. He gave his life for the animal because of the greed of the fishermen. That is why there really are Sasquatches.

Critically, children are capable of analyzing characters' motives and decisions. The characters themselves provide input into the views adopted by the reader/listener and so contribute to the interpretation of actions and story events. Wallace Martin notes that

the fact that critics often argue about whether a character has interpreted his or her world correctly serves as evidence that interpretations exist *within* the story as well as in what the readers say about it.¹⁴

Sometimes the author remains passive, giving over control entirely to the characters. Although some of the characters appear to know almost everything, it is often the reader who knows all. Credit for this goes to the

narrator, the person who communicates directly with the audience. For example, our commentator-narrator at the Mouse Hockey Tournament in Mice at Centre Ice interprets the battle and final victory of the mice in winning the Cheddar Cup from the Rink Rats:

The players skated over to the goal and jumped on Peppy. They pulled off his face mask and helmet, and rubbed his ears. Then the mouse hockey players piled on top of one another, pulling off helmets, whacking each other on the back celebrating their victory. Someone grabbed Benny's silver helmet and threw it into the crowd for a souvenir. A small white mouse caught it. ¹⁵

For the moment, the present-ness of the text calls for participation and total involvement. The reader/listener is not consciously aware of the narrator. Instead, the focus is on this mini-world of mice and their hockey victory.

E. Using interpretations to be critical

For the most part, when we are truly absorbed in the story experience, understandings and interpretations are not at the forefront of our attention. It is only in being called away from the text, or upon completion, that we are conscious of placing our own values on story events and attaching our own meanings. For the most part, W. Iser

says,

the synthesis (made by connecting signs and representing their equivalences) takes place below the threshold of consciousness, until they are raised above this threshold for the sake of analysis, though even they must first be formulated before they can become an object of scrutiny.¹⁶

Image building seems to be subjective and spontaneous, but identification of theme and significance require some after thought to the story itself. Wolfgang Iser's definition of "meaning" is useful here: meaning is "the referential totality which is implied by the aspects of the text and which must be assembled in the course of the reading."¹⁷ Meaning comes from the sequence of images suggested by the story. As the story progresses, new images overlap the old, provoking the reader's imagination and urging him to understand the story situations. However, in going beyond the immediate meanings found in the sequence of events, the story receiver often searches for significance--that is "the absorption of meaning"¹⁸ into one's own experience. The writer creates the story, but the reader/listener re-creates based on individual understandings and their significance on a personal level. The retellings analyzed earlier are an illustration of listeners' abilities to find varied but equally justifiable meanings in story.

When students have been intensely involved in a story, they are very inclined to discuss and make comments--to be critical and to elaborate on how the story

had meaning for them. By far the best short story of the school year in this study (unanimously agreed upon by students) was the short story, *Little Foot*, based on the mysterious Sasquatch theme. The story is complex in that it is a story written within a story, and each one is constructed from a different character's point of view. Yet students had no difficulty in following both perspectives and understanding the story as a whole.

When asked to discuss why this particular story was such a success, students had varied and numerous responses:

- When we were reading it, I could see what was going on in my head. I could put the stories side-by-side so that I could see the whole picture.

- I was really interested in how the fisherman and Little Foot got along. I had so many questions as I listened. Sometimes, I seemed to be Little Foot; sometimes Jake Mooney who I really liked. He cared a lot for Little Foot and showed this by going down to the beach everyday to give him crackers.

- This story makes me feel like I was there when it happened. It even seemed like it was true. This story was super from the beginning to the end. I especially liked how the author made someone else tell the story.

- The inner and outer stories are kind of the same in that they both happen at the same time and in the same place--but from different points of view.

By the time students reach eleven and twelve many of them have built in the conventions of the story world. They may be totally absorbed during the moments of reading and listening, but they also are astute critics once given the chance to step back from the story and reflect upon the experience. When they look objectively at their story

experiences, they recognize how both characters and narrator draw them in. And they are sure to recognize and give credit to the author as the creator of good story. Additionally, children have little difficulty in recognizing the value of another interpretation of the story which may be different from theirs.

F. Teaching implications

Because students are willing to accept a wide range of story interpretations, the teacher/reader needs to be careful not to impose his/her interpretations on the class. It is important for students to explore stories so as to find their own meanings. Exploration involves initial guessing and the building of expectations. In the context of story, exploration invites children into a subjective experience, allowing them to use their imagination, to move beyond the daily moment of life and into story time and place, to identify with character, and to gradually build an understanding of the story encountered--an understanding that may crystallize into a theme. Exploration in the story context, then, requires that the listener ease out of the experience and, perhaps, take a second look at the story meaning to locate the significance of the experience. This approach has much to say to the learning experience in any classroom.

Story is a fusion of seeing and feeling--both in the

literal and the imaginative sense. Story description and action bring about the immediacy of the text--a spontaneous and creative activity. But, good story, worth pondering, can be a soul-searching struggle: it invites reflection. Story is a complex organization of language so that enables multiple meanings and relationships to emerge.

To look at any thing
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say
'I have seen spring in these
Woods,' will not do-- you must
Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves,
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
they issue from. ¹⁹

Footnotes

¹Ruby Wiebe. (1970). *The Story-Makers*. Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, ix.

²K. Lever. (1961). *The Novel and the Reader*. London: Methuen, 101.

³Wallace Martin. (1986). *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 157.

⁴Thomas G. Mullins. (n.d). *They Asked for a Story...* Cork: University College, Education Department, 4-10.

⁵Wallace Martin. (1986). *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 165.

⁶Yetta Goodman. (1982). Retellings of literature and the comprehension process. *Theory into Practice*, 21(4), 303.

⁷Michael Novak. (1978). Autobiography and story. *Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 53.

⁸Jean George. (1959). *My Side of the Mountain*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 27.

⁹Ibid., 64.

¹⁰Ibid., 110.

¹¹Denys Thompson. Quoted in *Response to Literature*. Squire, James R. (Ed.). (1968). Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 57.

¹²Wolfgang Iser. (1974). *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, xiv.

¹³Estelle Salata. (1984). *Mice at Centre Ice*. Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 31.

¹⁴Wallace Martin. (1986). *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 169.

¹⁵Estelle Salata. (1984). *Mice at Centre Ice*. Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 120.

¹⁶Wolfgang Iser. (1974). *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 135.

¹⁷Ibid., 151.

¹⁸Ibid., 151.

¹⁹John Moffit in Charlotte Huck. (1979). *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 312.

VI. TWO PARADIGMS: CURRICULUM AS CONTENT

CURRICULUM AS STORY

When teachers are assigned a class and a subject to teach, one of their first tasks is to seek out the relevant curriculum. Provincial guides, local course descriptions, text books, and colleagues are the obvious resources in attempting to carry out the assignment. These are the commonplace for the nature of what we will do in the classroom. But, these resources only suggest the content--ultimately, the responsibility for teaching the curriculum becomes an individual one. In Teaching as Being: The Right to Personhood, Beverly Cunningham reflects upon her teaching experience:

[At one time] I used to think of teaching as doing certain things well. But I realize that it is how I experience the subject matter, my students, my colleagues and myself in the classroom that is ultimately communicated to, and learned by my students. I have, therefore, a responsibility to my students and to myself to experience what I do with joy. ...[The stance toward teaching should be] a kind of assertion of personhood: I have a right to experience my self as human being in the classroom. I teach what I am and what I experience. I am what I understand literature to be, I am what I feel about words and language, what I think, what I read, what I write and dream and believe.¹

What, then do the story experiences explored here have to say to curriculum and teaching?

From the perspective of the researcher-teacher, curriculum becomes much more than content--more than the textbook. Curriculum depends upon using personal resources

for teaching--my own resources and the resources of those who live within the classroom world with me. Built into the curriculum is human understanding and thoughtfulness--the desire to delve deeper into the personal experiences of myself and my students. Oral story and journal keeping provide ways to explore how we learn and make content meaningful.

The story world may take place in the 'pretend world', but this often translates into the real world. The experience speaks directly to the question of how children learn when coming upon new experience. How do they arrive at new understandings? And how can we, as teachers, attempt to establish a learning atmosphere within the classroom?

First, story as a curriculum orientation offers us a way of gaining insight into student/teacher experiences where confidentiality, respect for others, openness and communication are the basic elements of the classroom. There is much to be said for the teacher who joins in with his or her class in the learning experience. If we think back to our own classroom teachers, it is not what the teachers' taught us that we remember so much as their way of being.

Second, through story, we can begin to understand how children organize meaningful entities--whether the curriculum content is presented in story form or otherwise. As teachers, we need to remind ourselves that each child

will emerge with an individual understanding and point of view based upon what he/she is given in the classroom as well as what he/she brings in with himself or herself. For meaning to be established, children need to relate the experience in terms of their own life. In order to glean new understandings, children will often organize the tensions of the story by setting up abstract binary opposites, use their imagination to produce 'real' images, apply their own values, and try to identify an overall message or theme.

Furthermore, we might ask: if children (and adults) are so readily attracted to a good story, what does this imply about good teaching? Can we, as teachers, use the same elements that story uses to keep our audience spell-bound or, at least, interested? Teaching might then concentrate on building a little mystery and suspense into the lesson plan and allowing for more dialogue where the teacher becomes listener. It might also pay closer attention to how we can best use language to interest students and arouse their imaginations.

Does this set heavy demands upon the teacher? I think not. Many of these things can and do happen naturally in the classroom, especially at the elementary level. However, as children grow older and proceed through the intermediate and secondary grades, teachers might be forgetful that story can still intrigue and cause wonder. We need to leave space for children to pause and consider.

the content of the lesson. Children's access to meaning in curriculum should be of utmost concern. The good teacher recognizes that teaching is not just giving--it is receiving as well--allowing for dialogue that opens the door for both teacher and students to dwell in the learning experience. Story as a curriculum orientation invites us to discover and explore. Journals as a teaching tool invite communication. We want children to learn from the stories presented in the classroom, not just about them. This holds true not just for stories but for any curriculum content. We want children to be receptive, but also to be critical. Stories allow for both an imaginative and interpretative contribution on the part of the receiver. Just as story invites us as active participants in the construction of meaning, so should the classroom.

Moreover, teaching and researching is "investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it,..." [It allows for] "reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon."² Story is a way of understanding the world of fictional characters; we can reflect upon their actions and decisions. The encounter with stories can be a way of understanding how we move from the prosaic to the poetic and back again. Story creates uncertainty and exploration. But story can also be a way of understanding the between, that is, the experiences of students and teachers in creating dialogue and exchanging understandings--where understandings are based on

discovering the world around us and also the world inside each of us as individuals. In the process of exploring story, the children's own stories can emerge. The point is not necessarily to increase the fantasy content of school curricula--but rather to understand how children learn--to recognize the imaginative capacities of children--and, to take time to reflect upon the doing. In Ted Aoki's words,

Authentic teaching is watchfulness, a mindful watching over, flowing from the good in the situation that the good teacher sees.³

Footnotes

¹Beverley Cunningham. (1983). *Teaching as Being: The Right to Personhood. Occasional Paper No. 6.* Edmonton: Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, 2.

²Max van Manen. (1984.) Practicing phenomenological writing. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 2(4)*. Edmonton: Publication Services, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta.

³Ted T. Aoki. (n.d.) *Voices of Teaching: The Uncannily Correct and the Elusively True.* University of Alberta, 19.

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