Citation

The Challenge of Moving Beyond the Literal in Literature Discussions

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Drawing on data associated with an investigation of classroom read alouds and discussions of children's literature, this article conceptualizes the reading aloud and discussions of picturebooks as an "interpretive space" for elementary grade students' exploration of visual images and written text. Analyzing the types of responses student generated during discussions of three picturebooks, the study revealed the dominance of literal responses in comparison with interpretive responses in the classrooms studied. Further analysis showed that time spent reading and discussing picturebooks, varying the ways the books were presented and the types of questions asked by the classroom teacher affected the types of responses offered by the students.

The picturebook has become a prominent classroom resource during the past few decades (Bishop, 1992). Students have been asked to read and respond to stories and images contained in picturebooks as an essential element of literature-based reading programs. Understanding the meanings that students construct from these ubiquitous resources has played a major role in research on literature discussion and response and continues to warrant further studies.

Drawing on data associated with an investigation of classroom read alouds and subsequent discussions, this article conceptualizes discussions of picturebooks as "interpretive spaces" for elementary grade students' exploration of visual images and written text. By utilizing picturebooks as interpretive spaces, teachers can expand students' agency and interpretive repertoires as they are invited to become active constructors of meaning and forced to deal with the openness and indeterminacies of the written and visual representations included in picturebooks (Baddeley & Eddersaw, 1994; Moebuis, 1986; Nodelman, 1984).

The compound word "picturebook" has been used by various researchers and literary theorists to connote the unified nature of the written text and visual images of this

literary form (Kiefer, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000). The picturebook is a unique literary experience where meaning is generated simultaneously from written text and visual images. Sipe (1998) has described the relationship between written text and visual images in the picturebook as "synergistic," suggesting what is constructed from the combination of the two sign systems is greater than the potential meanings offered by either text or image in isolation. Each separate sign system, written language and visual image, transacts and transforms the other during the reading experience, allowing readers to oscillate back and forth between these two systems during their transactions with picturebooks. In addition, "picturebooks give children the opportunity to engage in an unending process of meaning making, as every rereading brings new ways of looking at words and pictures" (Sipe, 1998, p.107).

Picturebooks are unique in that they provide the reader with extensive visual images in addition to written text. Nodelman (1984) described how the text and the illustrations in a picture book expand as well as limit each other and identified this relationship as one of ambiguity or irony. Text contains temporal information that is presented to readers in a sequential, linear fashion as they progress from the start to the ending of a book. Illustrations, however, contain spatial information and are presented simultaneously, allowing readers to move their eyes around the page as they please. Because of the interplay of the text and illustrations, the possibilities for constructing meanings in transaction with a picture book are enhanced (Nodelman, 1984).

Understanding how young readers respond to written texts has an extensive history in literacy research (Marshall, 2000; Meek, 1988). Rosenblatt (1978) suggested, "a better understanding of how children 'learn to mean' in specific contexts should yield signals for those involved in all aspects of reading, especially research on response to literature and the teaching of literature" (p. 41). Studies of children's responses to the written text and visual images contained in contemporary picturebooks have demonstrated the ability of young readers to engage with and derive meaning in transaction with these complex texts (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; McClay, 2000; Pantaleo, 2004). In addition, research focusing on students' responses and transactions with picturebooks has described how readers approach the visual and textual components, design elements, interplay between text and images, and construct symbolic connections between the story-worlds presented in picturebooks and students' own experiences (Serafini, 2005).

Selecting literature to read to children is not a disinterested process, nor can it be accomplished by referring to a universal objective criterion. Picturebooks have emerged as an important resource throughout intermediate and middle grade classrooms (Anstey, 2002b; Bishop & Hickman, 1992). Research describing how teachers present these texts –including the instructional approaches used to engage readers in the process of constructing meaning with the text's written and visual elements–has been ongoing and continues to remain an important avenue of research due to the increasing number of these books being published and included in contemporary classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

In general, written text has been the dominant semiotic form in educational contexts, often relegating visual images to the role of supporting written text rather than

as a system of meaning in its own right (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The modes of written language and visual images are governed by distinct logics; written text is governed by the logic of time or temporal sequence, whereas the visual image is governed by the logic of spatiality, organized arrangements or composition, and simultaneity (Kress, 2003). Therefore, meaning is constructed in transaction with written texts from an element's position in the temporal sequence, whereas meaning is derived in transaction with visual images from spatial relations of visual elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Picturebooks are multimodal texts because they contain more than one mode or system of meaning. According to Kress (2003), each mode is a resource for representation that carries unique affordances and ways of making meaning. In addition to the two primary modes of representation, visual image and written text, picturebooks include unique formats and designs in their construction. Because of its multimodal nature, the picturebook provides a bridge from the traditional text-based literacy of the past with the multi-literacies necessary in the future (Anstey, 2002b).

Representation of meanings through written language or visual images is always partial, in effect limiting the viewer-reader to the perspectives presented. This partiality of representation of meanings creates an interpretive space where the viewer-reader is positioned to construct meaning in transaction with the written language and visual images created by the author-illustrator (Bainbridge & Pantaleo, 2001; Lewis, 2001). Because of the temporal and sequential nature of picturebooks, readers approach written texts and visual images differently, and their responses to these different modalities require further investigation.

It is important to reconceptualize the traditional read aloud as an interpretive space or interactive literacy event (Barrentine, 1996) where teachers and students co-construct meaning, articulate their interpretations, and negotiate these interpretations with other readers in the classroom community, when conducting research on students' responses to picturebooks and the development of their interpretive repertoires. Additionally, interactive read alouds and subsequent literary discussions occur in a social context where roles, identities, and power relations are played out in a continual revision of classroom discourse (Heap, 1985; Lewis, 2000). The reading aloud and discussing of picturebooks allows readers to construct various interpretations and negotiate meanings from written texts and visual images with other members of a literate community (Evans, 1998).

Study Design

This article reports on a qualitative, interpretivist study conducted in a third grade classroom, focusing on the types of responses that readers constructed in transaction with three selected picturebooks. Interpretivist research, as described by Erickson (1986), "is a matter of substantive focus and intent, rather than of procedure in data collection" (p. 120). Interpretivist research is designed to understand the meaning perspectives of the participants as they interact in their local contexts. We selected an interpretivist framework for this study because we were interested in understanding the meanings constructed by the students during the read aloud and discussions that occurred during their literacy block.

The three picturebooks, *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), *The Three*

Pigs (Wiesner, 2001), and *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2001) were presented, read and discussed in three ways to all of the students: (1) as complete picturebooks; (2) as text-only versions of the book, where the text was presented and discussed separately from the visual images; and (3) as visual storyboards, where the images were displayed in sequence simultaneously along the walls of the classroom. While the pages from the picturebooks presented as visual storyboards still contained the words from the original pages, the format allowed students to focus on the visual images. Presenting the picturebook in various disrupted formats was used to better understand how readers responded to the multimodal elements of the book. The following two questions guided the investigation:

1. What types of responses and meanings do young readers construct during their transactions with contemporary picturebooks?
2. How does disrupting the written and visual elements of picturebooks, and allowing an extended period of time for discussion, provide opportunities for responding to and interpreting these texts, and support the development of readers' interpretive repertoires?

Participants and Setting

With the assumption that researchers want to understand and gain insight from a population in which the most can be learned, participants in this study were selected via purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). Participants in this study included a third grade classroom teacher and 18 third grade students; ten girls and eight boys. The classroom was part of a professional development school in an urban school district in the Southwestern United States, in which 56% of the school's population was Hispanic, 23% was Caucasian, 13% was African American, 6 % was Asian and less than two percent was American or Alaska native. In general, the make-up of the classroom was consistent with the demographics of the entire school, which was considered an "at-risk" school by federal guidelines, with more than 95% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches.

The classroom teacher Ms. Ranch (all names are pseudonyms), a Caucasian female with eight years of primary grade teaching experience, was selected because of her extensive use of literature during her reading instructional framework. Ms. Ranch had used daily read alouds and discussions of picturebooks, both in their entirety and in text only format, as an important part of her reading program since the beginning of her career. Interviews with Ms. Ranch revealed that she spent considerable time setting expectations for her classroom discussions and expected students to listen carefully to the picturebooks she shared and to pay close attention to the written texts and visual images. Ms. Ranch considered herself to be flexible in her instructional approaches and explained that she was open to allowing students to respond freely to picturebooks as they were read aloud and shared.

The study took place over a three-week period, during which time researchers observed read alouds of the selected picturebooks and the subsequent discussions. Each picturebook was read and discussed for a full week, with each read aloud and discussion lasting between 20 and 35 minutes. Observations were conducted during the class's literacy block, which also included, but not addressed in this research, the use of a mandated basal reading program. Six students were pulled from class throughout the day

to participate in a reading intervention program; however, all students were part of the read alouds and discussions during the study.

The three books selected for this study, *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2001), and *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001) were chosen because (a) the author and illustrator were one and the same person for each book, so that one person made decisions about what to include in the visual images and what to include in the written text, (b) each picturebook provided opportunities for close inspection of visual images and written text due to the complexity of the books and their award-winning illustrations, (c) literary analyses were readily available for each book, including author interviews and commentaries, published review materials, and research studies, and (d) the design and structure of each picturebook offered unique possibilities for storyboard presentations. Ms. Ranch had read *Where the Wild Things Are* before the study, but the other two texts, *The Three Pigs* and *Voices in the Park*, were unfamiliar to her when the study began.

During the read alouds and discussions, students were seated on the floor in close proximity to the teacher to better see and hear the texts being read and discussed. At other times, students roamed the room to look at the storyboard presentation of the three texts. Storyboard presentations were created using color copies of all pages in each picturebook including the cover and the end pages. These pages were posted on the wall of the classroom. Students also worked in small groups to discuss the stories or work on response activities, including writing on post-it notes, sharing predictions, and charting responses.

For each of the three books, the first two read alouds and discussions, on Monday and Tuesday of each week, were interactive, where the teacher facilitated the discussion allowing students to respond to the whole picturebooks. Day three, Wednesday, focused on a "text-only" presentation of the picturebook, where the text had been typed up on a separate sheet of paper helping to focus students' attention on the written text. On day four, Thursday of each week, students focused on an "illustrations-only" storyboard presentation, where the illustrations were displayed across the wall in the classroom allowing students to focus on the visual images and design. Day five, Friday, focused on the sharing of other connected texts, for example, author interviews, other books by the author-illustrator, and other epi-textual materials (Genette, 1999). Throughout each week, Ms. Ranch constructed classroom charts to record students' responses and provide supporting artifacts for further discussions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data sources included field notes constructed during the read aloud and discussion sessions, transcripts from audiotapes of each day's discussions, artifacts created in conjunction with the discussions, and four interviews conducted with the classroom teacher before and after the classroom observations. The data analysis procedures used in this study are consistent with an interpretivist model of qualitative research (Erickson, 1986). According to Erickson (1986), "the basic task of data analysis is to generate assertions that vary in scope and level of inference, largely through induction, and to establish an evidentiary warrant for the assertions one wishes to make" (p. 146). All categories were created inductively with no predetermined categories.

Categories were constructed through comparative analysis of the data as it was collected and after the classroom observations and interviews were completed.

Utilizing a constant comparative analysis of the data being collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), transcripts and other data were read and analyzed as they were constructed, and again at the end of the data collection period. Theoretical memos, written during the data collection period, were generated and used as a resource for theorizing about the data being collected. These memos provided an initial foundation for the data analysis as it proceeded.

Using conversational turns (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) as the unit of analysis, students' responses to the three picturebooks were initially organized into eight categories. All student responses and utterances were considered separate conversational turns and categorized only once through our data analysis. Each response was coded into one of the categories, though there were times when they may have fit into more than one category. Researchers coded the data separately, and they afterwards collaboratively resolved any discrepancies concerning which category the responses would fit. In addition, data in each category were analyzed for their occurrence in the instructional sequence, days one through five, and across the three different picturebooks, allowing the researchers to associate students' responses with the various instructional resources and approaches utilized.

Results

Across the 15 days of observed read alouds and subsequent discussions, 1,561 student responses were coded and organized under the following eight descriptors: a) naming – literal naming of elements in the visual images, b) direct textual reference – noticing and discussing elements contained directly in the written text, c) expressive responses – verbal or physical responses initiated by events written in the text or depicted in the visual images, d) choral responses –whole class responses to teacher pauses, prompts or questions, e) connections – making connections to personal experiences or other texts including books, movies and television programs, f) questions – posing questions in response to the written text and images, g) speculations – speculating possible outcomes in the various storylines, and h) inferences – responses attributable to the written text or visual images but went beyond the literal text to include evidence of interpretative activity.

Guided by the cognitive and interpretative levels of student responses (Nystrand, 1997), the researchers reorganized the initial eight descriptions under two broad categories: literal response and interpretive response. Literal responses were directly related to the actual text or elements contained directly in the visual images. These responses demonstrated recall and attention to the picturebooks but no evidence of comprehension beyond literal recall and perception. Interpretive responses contained comments and interpretations inferred from the text and images and suggested students were connecting the text and images to their lives, to other texts, and to the world.

Literal Responses

Included within the broader category of literal response were four of the initial codes: naming visual elements, direct textual references, choral responses, and expressive

responses. These responses were grouped together because they focused on the literal text and images, and did not include interpretive references. Of the total number of student responses, 1,233 or 79 percent were categorized as literal response. This percentage suggests that a majority of the responses offered during the discussions focused on literal aspects of the picturebook (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Total Student Responses*

Category	N	Percentage
Literal	1,233	79%
Interpretive	328	21%
Total	1.561	100%

The category of naming visual elements included student responses that referred to the visual elements within each of the three picturebooks. This category accounted for 38 of the literal responses. Some examples of naming visual elements included; "the trees are on fire" from *Voices in the Park,* "Max is wearing a wolf suit" from *Where the Wild Things Are,* and "the pigs made an airplane" from *The Three Pigs*. The abundance of this type of response demonstrated that students attended to the visual elements on a literal level but offered no indication that they were involved in the interpretation of these visual elements beyond naming them.

The category of direct textual references was used to describe responses where students noticed elements of the written text, and represented the largest category; 56% of the responses were categorized as direct textual references (see Table 2). This category included responses such as, "it says right here in the text" or "the words said" to support an idea stated directly in the written text. Relying solely on the written text to support responses, students confirmed or disconfirmed ideas offered during the discussions by referencing specific passages within the three books. In one example, during a reading of *Voices in the Park,* the teacher asked, "So who has disappeared here?" to which a student responded, "Charles, his Mom says he disappeared." Evidence supporting the responses to teacher questions and prompts in this category were to be found directly in the literal text.

Table 2. *Types of Literal Responses*

Literal	N	Percentage
Naming visual elements	475	38%
Naming textual reference	696	56%
Expressive	53	4%
Choral	9	2%
Total	1,233	100%

Only four percent of the literal responses analyzed were coded as expressive responses. These responses were often exclamatory in nature referring directly to the written text and visual elements that evoked some emotional reaction in the students, but they did not indicate further evidence of interpretation. Theoretically, we believe it is impossible to respond emotionally without understanding the text and illustrations; however, these emotional responses were not indicative of further interpretive processes. Therefore, due to a lack of comments indicating an interpretative analysis, the expressive responses were included with literal responses and analyzed separately from the inferential responses.

Finally, choral responses, although they represented only one percent of the total responses analyzed, were included in the category of literal responses. Groups of students answered questions simultaneously or responded chorally to the teacher's "directed pauses." For example, during the reading of *The Three Pigs* students were asked what the Caldecott Medal was awarded for each year, to which the students responded chorally, "the illustrations." The responses included in the literal category related directly to the literal text and visual images and did not offer any evidence of interpretation or analysis.

The percentage of responses that were categorized under the heading of literal, in contrast with those categorized as interpretive, represented over 75 percent of the responses offered by students. This large number of literal responses may relate directly to the types of questions the teachers asked and the expectations that were set for their discussions and responses.

Interpretive Responses

Included within the broader category of interpretive responses were the following four initial descriptors: connections, questions, speculations, and inferences. Of the total number of responses, 21% or 328 responses were included under the heading of interpretive responses. Interpretive responses went beyond the literal text and visual images, and they included connections to personal experiences and to other texts, speculations about characters' actions and motives, predictions about future events in the story, and inferences based on the written text and visual images.

Students made connections during the discussions of all three picturebooks and represented 12% of the interpretive responses (see Table 3). Connections included personal connections and intertexutal connections. Students' connections were often teacher initiated; for example, when Ms. Ranch asked students if they had any connections for inclusion on their classroom charts, students would respond with their connections. The teacher asked students to make connections during the discussions, and she affirmed their responses as being important.

Table 3. *Interpretive Responses*

Types of responses	N	Percentage
Connections	41	12%
Questions	75	23%
Speculations	6	2%

Inferences	206	63%
Total	328	100%

An example of an intertextual connection occurred as students compared the traditional version of *The Three Little Pigs* with Wiesner's *The Three Pigs*. Personal connections were made during the discussions of each picturebook, relating the experiences of the characters in the stories with events in students' lives.

Students inquired into the authors' intentions and asked questions about elements of the written text and visual images they found challenging. Students asked questions to clarify design and visual elements throughout the reading of the three picturebooks. For example, one student asked several times, "I wonder why the tree is on fire?" referring to a reoccurring motif in *Voices in the Park*. Several students also questioned why hats were frequently displayed in the visual images in *Voices in the Park*. These questions went beyond the literal elements contained in the written text and visual images, and they served as an aide in attempting to comprehend what the author/illustrator had done in the story. Asking questions represented 23% of the interpretive responses made.

Students offered speculations during the reading of all three picturebooks, with a majority of them being made during the discussions of *Where the Wild Things Are*. Numerous speculative responses focused on the character of Max. For example, during a discussion about what might occur after Max was sent to bed without his supper, one student suggested, "Maybe his room is going to turn into a jungle." Additional speculations were made focusing on the possible reasons Max's room was changing into a jungle; specifically, whether he was dreaming or whether he was simply using his imagination. One student speculated, "Since he [Max] can't play downstairs, maybe he is imagining in his room that there's a lot of monsters in the jungle." Students also spoke about what might take place regarding the wild things, for example, "maybe he [Max] is going to shrink them." Another student posited, "Maybe the monsters will listen to him [Max]." Speculations represented two percent of the total number of inferential responses.

Students made inferences in response to all three picturebooks, with the number of inferences that occurred during the discussion of *Voices in the Park* almost double the number of inferences that occurred with *The Three Pigs*. (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Interpretive Responses in Three Picturebooks*

Book	Connections	Questions	Speculations	Inferences
Three Pigs	18	19	0	51
WTWTA	6	34	0	63
Voices	17	22	6	92

Of the 206 responses coded as inferences, 92 responses, or 45%, occurred during the five days spent discussing *Voices in the Park*. Responses were categorized as inferences, for example, when students were attempting to understand the relationship between Charlie and Smudge, two of the main characters portrayed in the story. During

one discussion, a student stated, "they [Charles and Smudge] love each other." Another student said, "Charlie doesn't want to go home because he might not see Smudge again." The higher percentage of inferences occurring during the reading of this text could be contributed to several factors, including the complexity of the text, the fact that this was the third and final picturebook read and discussed in the study, or students' engagement with the nature of Browne's unusual artwork. Students seemed to enjoy *Voices in the Park* more than the other two books. They went back and looked at the images more frequently than in the case of the other two books. This increased engagement may have been a factor in the higher percentage of inferences. Browne's surrealistic illustrations and unusual story design required readers to move beyond literal meanings and to dig deeper into why Browne included various visual elements and what they might mean.

Of the total 328 responses categorized as interpretive responses, 219 or 66 percent occurred during the fourth and fifth day of discussion for each of the three books (see Table 5).

Table 5. *Responses by Day of the Week*

Responses	Day 1 (M) Picturebook	Day 2 (T) Picturebook	Day 3 (W) Text-only	Day 4 (Th) Storyboard	Day 5 (F) Other text
Literal	327	241	253	193	219
Interpretive	35	55	19	113	106

As students roamed the room observing and discussing the storyboards displayed on the classroom wall during the fourth day of each week, they attended to the visual elements of each picturebook. For example, one student discussed the directionality of the waves on which Max's boat sailed in *Where the Wild Things Are*. He believed the waves represented how Max was sailing away from his home, whereas at the end of the book the waves shifted direction suggesting that Max was sailing back home.

Additionally, students tried to explain the extensive use of white space throughout the illustrations in *The Three Pigs* stating, "maybe right there they [the three pigs] went away or something." And, "oh, I know, like they flew away." Similarly, in an illustration depicting Charles and Smudge playing on a bandstand in *Voices in the Park*, the bandstand is brightly colored but the background is dark and cloudy. In reference to the image of the bandstand a student stated, "they [Charles and Smudge] are having a good time because they are painted in bright colors."

Discussion

The data suggests a majority of the amount of time spent during the reading aloud and discussion of the various picturebooks was devoted to the literal elements of the picturebooks selected. Nystrand (1997) views literal recitation as the presentation of old information, including responses that do not stimulate interpretation or higher levels of thinking. Although conscious attention to the elements of the written text and visual images is an important component of comprehension and interpretation, it is an

insufficient step in the process of constructing meaning in transaction with picturebooks.

This increase in interpretive responses may be accounted for by the extended duration of time students had to read, analyze and discuss the book, the types of questions being asked by the teacher, or the differences in attending to the visual images rather than the written text. Further investigation is warranted to describe and understand this change in the number of interpretive responses more completely. While literal responses remained relatively consistent, there was a noticeable increase in the number of interpretive responses across time.

A primary concern raised by our analysis of students' responses to the picturebooks was the relatively small percentage of interpretive responses when compared to the number of literal responses. Over 75 percent of the students' responses simply stated or confirmed what was already included in the written text or visual images. Going beyond the literal level of response, regardless of whether this response was to the textual or the visual elements of the picturebooks, is vital for expanding the interpretive repertoires of young readers. The actual written and visual elements of a picturebook should be viewed as a point of departure for interpretation and comprehension, not the primary focus of literature discussions. Calling readers' attention to the textual and visual elements in picturebooks is important, but not as important as helping them interpret what these elements mean and discussing their interpretations with other readers.

In pedagogical terms, reading teachers need to help young readers call forth the literal elements of the written text and visual elements, but they must further the comprehension process by discussing possible meanings, connections, and interpretations that do not simply reside within the written and visual components of a picturebook. Literal recall questions may limit the types of meanings that can be made by the reader.

Nystrand's (1997) research suggests that teachers' questions, discussion techniques, expectations, instructional moves, and responses to students' ideas change the types of responses students construct. By asking more open-ended questions, allowing students to discuss the connections they generate, negotiating ideas with other readers, and reconsidering previous interpretations, teachers can open up the interpretive space to allow more sophisticated understandings to be generated.

A brief analysis of the types of questions asked by the classroom teacher in our study revealed 85 percent were factual or literal level questions. These questions focused students' attention on the literal elements of the texts. In other words, the teacher received the types of responses in conjunction with the types of questions she asked. Given the teacher's reputation as an effective reading teacher, we were surprised by the large percentage of display or lower level questions she asked during the discussions we observed. Numerous studies have documented the prevalence of display or literal questions, (e.g. Cazden 1988; Goodlad, 1984) in the elementary and secondary classroom. This type of classroom interaction has been referred to as the "recitation script" (Gutierrez, 1994) and has been demonstrated to limit the range of answers accepted by teachers and suppress students' interpretative abilities.

Along with pointing to the need for open-ended questions that invite interpretations, this study also suggests that images have great potential to open up rich interpretive spaces. Of the three formats in which the book was presented, students generated more inferential responses for the storyboard than for the other ways of

presenting the book that focused on a reading of the written words. Although this increase in inferential thinking may not be attributed to the storyboard alone, these data are nonetheless indicative that images can play a central role in a discussion-oriented literacy curriculum designed to encourage multiple interpretations.

Picturebooks are multimodal texts using design features, written text, and visual images to tell their stories. It is important to shift our focus from print-based literacies to multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) in order to extend the possibilities that picturebooks offer as a bridge between traditional print based literacies and new literacies. Teachers and students need to develop a "meta-language" to talk about and comprehend the multimodal texts they encounter in their daily lives (Callow, 1999). A theoretical shift from psychological theories of literary design and art interpretation (e.g. Arnheim, 1986; Gombrich, 1961) to socio-cultural theories of multiliteracies demands a parallel shift in the pedagogical techniques teachers employ to address the needs of readers in new times. Presenting the written text and visual images in separate displays enabled the teacher to call students' attention to particular components of the written texts and visual images, expanding students' interpretive repertoires in the process.

In order for classroom teachers to support students' development of a "meta-language" to understand multimodal texts, they must first be able to read, analyze and comprehend these texts on a more sophisticated level themselves. Our interviews with Ms. Ranch alerted us to her concerns about her lack of literary expertise in knowing what to call students' attention to during discussions of the picturebooks. It was interesting that the book she felt the most uncomfortable with, *Voices in the Park*, was also the one with the most inferences offered by students. This may suggest that the teacher's lack of knowledge of the postmodern elements of the text provided opportunities for students to offer unfettered or undirected responses and interpretations. Although we are not calling for increasing teachers' ignorance of literature and literary devices, we are suggesting that teachers should learn how to infuse this knowledge into literature discussions without always dominating the focus and direction of the discussion. In this way, their knowledge is offered tentatively, allowing students' meanings to be offered in an open interpretive space before being limited and directed by the teacher posing literal questions and endorsing other types of naming.

Of further interest during the analysis of the data was the fact that most of the inferences occurred during the fourth and fifth day of the weeklong interactions around each book. In one's fervor to cover the reading curriculum and expose students to a wide variety of texts, does a "read a book once and move on" mentality deny the possibilities for interpretation and the construction of inferences that may occur only after prolonged time and exposure to a single text? The research presented here suggests the extended time dedicated to each picturebook created an extended interpretive space for readers to delve more deeply into each picturebook and develop more sophisticated interpretations. Although we would not recommend a large number of entire weeks being dedicated to the reading and discussions of individual picturebooks in an elementary classroom, the length of time devoted to these three picturebooks provided opportunities for the teacher and students to construct meanings and interpretations that were not evident during the initial readings of the picturebooks.

By reading and discussing these three selected picturebooks for five days each, the classroom teacher opened up more interpretive space for students to go beyond the

literal level of the text, whether students took advantage of this or not. However, the role of the teacher, the questions she asked and the expectations for discussion she set played an important role in the types of responses offered.

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