

CHILDREN SPEAKING WITH CHILDREN

Visualizing Engagement Through Contemporary Canadian Picture Books in French Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books in two primary French classrooms in an urban public school in Montréal. The thesis documents a collaborative literacy project *Les enfants qui parlent aux enfants* (Children Speaking with Children) involving my work with sixty-four children and two teachers in Grades One and Two French classrooms. The teachers and children read and responded to a selection of Canadian picture books exploring themes related to identity, belonging, and relationships. Listening to children's voices was central to both the research methodology and the conceptual framework for this collaborative literacy project. Literacy is a social and cultural practice that is relational, situated, and dialogical. An "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006) can emerge as children and teachers deeply engage with "visual literature" (Salisbury & Styles, 2012) to provoke new ways of seeing, listening, and imagining in diverse classrooms. Scholars are increasingly paying attention to the visual (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012) and yet there is still much to be learned about children's engagements with images and words in contemporary picture books. The study set out to explore the following broad question,

How may listening to young children's responses to contemporary picture books, in word and image, inform our understanding of young children's engagements with literature in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms?

Within that question, I also explored a sub-question: *What is the role of the teacher in supporting children's engagement with picture books?* The shared experience of participating in stories and responding through drawing, painting, writing, and dialogue contributed to the community of the culturally, linguistically, religiously, and ethnically diverse primary classrooms. The findings underscored the children's interest in expressing their thoughts and feelings in response to stories. The wide-ranging variety of visual responses to stories also indicated the individual ways that children engage creatively with literature, particularly when given time and space to respond. Teachers played an important role in guiding children's engagements with the complexity of words and images and in listening children's responses. Children's encounters with contemporary picture books that are counter-narratives (Bradford, 2007) are critical to deepening a sense of community in which diverse voices, and rights, are heard, respected, and understood. The study has important implications for language and literacy pedagogy, particularly in revealing the need to ensure that all children have opportunities to feel a sense of belonging and connection. Counter-narratives in contemporary visual literature for children offer "a more expansive landscape upon which to dream" of possibilities for future destinations (Myers, 2014, para. 14). I conclude that, for children and teachers, engaging deeply with picture books involves slowing down to fully appreciate the richness of the stories.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse étudie les réponses des enfants qui ont lu les albums canadiens et contemporains dans le contexte de deux salles de classe du primaire dans une école urbaine publique à Montréal. Cette étude qualitative a été réalisée avec la collaboration de deux enseignantes et soixante-quatre enfants de première et de deuxième année en faisant la lecture d'une sélection de livres jeunesse autour du thème: *Les enfants qui parlent aux enfants*. Les livres traitent les sujets relatifs à l'identité, à l'appartenance et à la communauté. La littératie est relationnelle, située, et dialogique. La méthodologie et le cadre conceptuel de ce projet collaboratif de littératie ont été élaborés à partir de l'idée d'écouter les voix des enfants. Il est possible qu'une « communauté imaginée » (Anderson, 2006) émerge lorsque les enfants et les enseignants sont engagés profondément avec « la littérature visuelle » (Salisbury & Styles, 2012) afin de provoquer de nouvelles façons de voir et imaginer. D'ailleurs, puisque les théories de la communication visuelle contribuent à l'étude des pratiques de la littératie, les chercheurs portent plus d'attention au visuel (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012). La question principale de cette étude est la suivante,

*Comment écouter les réponses des enfants, leurs mots, et leurs images
concernant les albums canadiens contemporains?*

Et en lien avec cette question principale, j'explore une question secondaire: *Quel est le rôle de l'enseignant(e) dans l'engagement des enfants avec la littérature de jeunesse?* Les expériences de partager les histoires et de répondre de façon créative à travers les dessins, la peinture, l'écriture, et les conversations ont contribué à la construction de la communauté dans ces groupes où il y avait une grande diversité ethnoculturelle, linguistique et religieuse. Les résultats ont souligné l'intérêt des enfants d'exprimer leurs pensées et sentiments envers les histoires. La variété de réponses visuelles des enfants a indiqué leurs façons différentes d'interpréter les histoires, surtout quand il y avait du temps suffisamment de réfléchir et de créer. Les enseignantes ont joué un rôle important en soutenant les enfants dans leurs interprétations de la complexité des mots et des images et en écoutant leurs réponses. Pour les jeunes lecteurs, les expériences avec les contre-narratives (Bradford, 2007) peuvent soutenir le développement d'un sens de communauté plus profond où toutes les voix sont entendues, valorisées, et prises en compte. Les résultats suggèrent d'implications importantes pour la pédagogie de la langue et de la littératie, en révélant le besoin d'assurer que tous les enfants ont l'occasion d'avoir un sens d'appartenance. La contre-narration dans la littérature visuelle de jeunesse contemporaine offre aux lecteurs « un paysage plus vaste sur laquelle on peut rêver » des possibilités de l'avenir (Myers, 2014, para. 14). En conclusion, pour les enfants et les enseignants, l'engagement profond avec les albums nécessite un ralentissement afin d'en apprécier toute la richesse et la poésie.

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my grandfather,
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A LOVE OF STORIES

The key is curiosity, and it is curiosity, not answers, that we model. As we seek to know more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected. "What are these ideas that I have that are so interesting to the teacher? I must be somebody with good ideas.

Paley, 1986, p. 127

A few years ago, when I was teaching French immersion kindergarten in Lethbridge, Alberta, I first heard Vivian Paley address teachers at an Early Childhood Education Council Conference in Edmonton (November 9-11, 2006). The theme of the conference was *Every Child Has a Story*. I was deeply moved and inspired by her ideas of being attentive to the words of children, thereby making children's lived experiences and stories central to the classroom curriculum. My questions about how children can empower themselves through telling their stories and hearing others tell their stories ignited my curiosity about children's experiences with stories, which led me to pursue research in language and literacy studies.

Stories are a part of our every-day human interactions. For young children, stories are a way to make sense of the world, explore one's sense of self and relationships with others, and develop imaginative thinking. Within the world of children's literature internationally, and as picture book makers become increasingly innovative with artistic styles, the question of how children experience texts is one that is presently receiving more attention, as researchers are considering the ways that children interpret and make meaning (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Colemer, Kummerling-Meibauer, & Silva-Diaz, 2010; Meek, 1982, 1992; Panteleo, 2015; Salisbury & Styles, 2012; Sipe, 2008). And yet, children's responses to picture books is an area of literacy research that is still relatively new, with much ground to explore in terms of children's understandings of the words and images in texts (Nikolajeva, 2010; Sipe, 2008).

The guiding purpose of this inquiry was to explore children's responses to contemporary Canadian children's literature, specifically picture books, in the context of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. I was interested in how young children would engage with both the visual and verbal narratives of picture books. Because classroom and school populations are increasingly diverse (Chambers, 2003; Naqvi, 2009), we need to have a better understanding of how literacy practices are changing and how educators may adapt to meet the learning needs and interests of children. As such, this study draws from theories of childhood studies developed by researchers who advocate for research that listens and responds to children's views and experiences (Edwards, Gandini, & Forma, 1998; Waller, 2006). Central to this study is the idea of listening to the voices of children and paying close attention to their literacy experiences with picture books. I acknowledge that children's voices and perspectives are multifaceted, fluid, and related to the "interactional context" (Komulainen, 2007; Spyrou, 2011). This study is designed to involve children actively in engaging with literature and response to literature through the six strands of Language Arts (speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing).

As we know from accounts of the writing and illustration process, authors and illustrators of contemporary children's books often have a keen awareness of the power of narrative to empower, inspire, and challenge young readers (Maclear, 2016; Myers, 2014; Salisbury & Styles,

2012). The desire to write and produce stories is often fuelled by deep personal experience and with a knowledge that the stories children read have the potential to spark imagination, critical thinking, and reflection among young children in relation to how they see themselves and others.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) employs the metaphor of literature as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, as children need to see themselves in the stories they read while also gaining insights into the perspectives of others. Naqvi (2009) also employs this concept of mirrors and windows in her work with children reading dual language texts. In a special issue of the *New York Times*, author Christopher Myers (2014) cites a recent study of children's books showing that 93 of 2,300 children's books published in the United States in 2013 feature characters who are black (Cooperative Children's Book Centre, 2013). Myers describes the apartheid in children's literature in which "characters of color are limited to the townships of occasional historical books that concern themselves with civil rights and slavery but are never given a pass card to traverse the lands of adventure, curiosity, imagination or personal growth" (para. 6). While Myers makes reference to the notion of literature as mirrors "from the understanding that your life and lives of people like you are worthy of being told, thought about, discussed, and even celebrated" (para. 10), he suggests that children, even more importantly, "create, through the stories they're given, an atlas of their world, of their relationships to others, of their possible destinations" (para. 11). Myers' notion of a book as a map or atlas that offers guidance to children, like Sims Bishop's notion of windows, reminds us that we need to think critically about the stories and possibilities that are made available to young readers,

It's about respecting children and not underestimating their willingness to take on thorny, thought-provoking subjects or their openness in approaching the complicated and unfamiliar—especially if the stories are beautiful, funny, dramatic and non-medicinal. (Maclear, 2016, para. 14)

Listening to stories written by authors of diverse communities in the Canadian context, including indigenous and immigrant writers, provides readers with counter-narratives. Counter-narratives could be defined as stories told from different perspectives that resist dominant discourse. Alberto Mora (2014) defines counter-narratives as follows,

Counter-narrative refers to the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized...A counter-narrative goes beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. Instead, these must come *from the margins*, from the perspectives and voices of those individuals. A counter-narrative thus goes beyond the telling of stories that take place in the margins. The effect of a counter-narrative is to empower and give agency to those communities. By choosing their own words and telling their own stories, members of marginalized communities provide alternative points of view, helping to create complex narratives...(para. 1)

Bradford (2007) cites Terdiman's (1985) work on counter-discourse that "demonstrates both how dominant discourses retain their dominance, and how symbolic resistance occurs" (p. 23). Stories that are counter-narratives, including postcolonial texts (Bradford, 2007), offer new and alternative ways of seeing, imagining, and being a citizen in a changing Canadian society. The ways in which authors use language to express ideas and world views, and in which artists express the landscape and vision, broaden our concept of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2006) through the polyvocality present in the visual and verbal narratives created by contemporary authors from a variety of backgrounds within Canadian society. Anderson (2006) describes how the printing press contributed to the "imagined communities" of the modern nation state. By that he is referring to the nation as "an imagined political community...It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6, emphasis in original). I am using the term "imagined community" to mean the space that children and teachers may be able to envision in response to picture books, contributing to ways of relating to one another within a collective community characterized by plurality where multiple voices and identities are respected, heard, and acknowledged. Contemporary "visual literature" as Salisbury & Styles (2012) term it, enables new ways of imagining and understanding what it means to live together in societies. This relates to the issue of which texts are selected for classrooms and read by children, particularly given the reality

of “[g]lobal population flows” which “challenge the nation-state as a geographically and historically determined space for children’s literature” (Kelen & Sundmark, 2013, p. 6). As noted by Strong-Wilson (2008),

One of the primary ways in which the imagined nation is told is through its stories: what is published, written, reviewed, selected for inclusion within curricula or school libraries, which stories are told and re-told on parents’ laps, in classroom read-alouds...(p. 59)

Children’s books such as *Viola Desmond Won’t Be Budged* (Warner, 2010), *Suki’s Kimono* (Uegaki, 2005) and *Malaika’s Costume* (Hohn, 2016) are examples of counter-narratives for young readers in the Canadian context. *Viola Desmond Won’t Be Budged* is the story of Viola Desmond who refused to leave her seat in the designated white section of a movie theatre in 1940’s Nova Scotia, during the time of racial segregation. *Suki’s Kimono* portrays the young Suki who expresses her cultural identity and pride in being Japanese Canadian. The reader is introduced to the unique perspectives of the characters and their experiences of belonging and exclusion. Nadia Hohn’s *Malaika’s Costume* addresses the important topic of separation of family members as Malaika’s mother has moved away to Canada to work so that she can support her family in the Caribbean. The characters in *Viola Desmond Won’t Be Budged*, *Suki’s Kimono*, and *Malaika’s Costume* each tell the story of relationships within and across borders, reflecting the complexity of notions of belonging, identity, and community.

Maclear (2016) emphasizes that we need to consider a critical diversity that “moves beyond superficial inclusion to highlight differences within communities, accounting for class position, disability, gender, religion.” In describing the work of Caribbean Canadian author Dionne Brand, who writes poetry for children and novels for adults grounded in her own memories, Rinaldo Walcott (2003) states,

Brand’s use of language is essential in her re-ordering of Canadian literary realities because she brings new sounds and tonality to what may be considered Canadian. Her use of language signals the unsettled restlessness of the exile and refugee who must rechart, remap, and regroup so both self and collectivity are made evident and present. (p. 49)

As noted by Colomer, Kümmerling-Meibaur, and Silva-Díaz (2010), “picture book illustration is a subtle and complex art form that can communicate on many levels and leave a deep imprint on a child’s consciousness” (p. 1). Taking a closer look at picture books with their combination of words and images is a concern for researchers across the disciplines of children’s literature and education. Such work has far-reaching implications for educators, parents, authors, illustrators, publishers, and, most importantly, children themselves.

Bradford (2007) notes “the language of all books performs and embodies ideologies of all kinds, since children’s texts purposively intervene in children’s lives to propose ways of being in the world” (p. 6). Within Canadian society, where we are currently in what editors proclaim to be the ‘Golden’ age of picture books (Cerny, 2015), I am interested in how children within an increasingly changing Canadian society respond to innovative picture books by contemporary book creators.

Recently, there has been much discussion about the complexity of Canadian children’s picture books (Cerny, 2015). Canadian editor of Groundwood Books, Sheila Barry (2015) has pointed out that school libraries play an important role in ensuring that children read books on a range of topics that are relevant to their lives,

We are not born knowing that books can teach us counting and the alphabet, can make us laugh, and can reflect our joy in being alive. We are not born knowing that books can offer comfort as well as entertainment. And we certainly aren’t born knowing that books can help us make sense of our deepest fears or most terrible experiences. For very young children to learn all that books can do, adults have to read all kinds of books with them. (p. 10)

Within the Canadian classroom, there exist opportunities for teachers and children to engage in rich conversations as they read and discuss contemporary Canadian children’s literature. Researchers have examined the importance of engaging teachers, pre-service as well as in-service, with teaching for social justice through literature, so as to increase children’s access to such stories (Johnston, Bainbridge, & Sharif, 2007; Strong-Wilson, 2008). Literary theorists Edwards and Saltman (2010) point out that while picture books can,

Contribute to the discourse of equity through the decentring of power in multicultural relations...few Canadian picture books challenge the dominant uncritical and unquestioning acceptance of multiculturalism as an unproblematic social good, a hegemonic construct in which intercultural tensions can be resolved by the majority being tolerant of minority groups without any shifting of power. (p. 196)

I will look at picture books that *do* challenge the dominant “acceptance of multiculturalism as an unproblematic social good” and do rather provide counter-narratives to this “hegemonic construct” described by Edwards and Saltman (2010). Through my work as a Research Assistant on SSHRC projects and while completing this doctoral research study, I have found that there are a rich variety of Canadian texts available, particularly through independent bookstores and Canadian publishing houses, which dare to challenge the hegemony and push the boundaries.

Many Canadian authors and illustrators are increasingly addressing critical issues related to social justice and human rights, and these texts are catalysts for social change. This thesis explores how contemporary picture books enable children and teachers to engage in thinking about social issues relevant to children’s lives. As such, this study is situated within a multiliteracies pedagogy that acknowledges the “social, intellectual, and semiotic resources students bring from multiple fields of communicative practice” (Taylor, 2008, p. 92). According to Taylor (2008), a multiliteracies pedagogy challenges the “*hegemonic multiculturalism* that narrates Canada as an immigrant meritocracy hosted by white British and French ‘founding nations’ and racializes ‘multicultural Canadians’ as eternal newcomers and ‘minorities’ whose bodies and forms of knowledge are indelibly inscribed as *from elsewhere*” (p. 95; emphasis in the original). Contemporary Canadian children’s literature with diverse narratives and perspectives offers readers an opportunity to imagine and engage with the realities and complexities of living in a diverse society. It is important for researchers and educators to consider the complex, dynamic, and multiple identities of children. Creating a learning environment of mutual respect, where all individuals feel valued, is central to an inclusive and democratic education.

Chambers (2003) reminds us that many Canadian classrooms are “probably the most ethnically, racially, linguistically and religiously diverse of any school population in the world” (p. 223). The diversity of Canadian classrooms, and classrooms globally, requires educators to consider ways to make classrooms, and the curriculum, inclusive of the children within these spaces (Chambers, 2003; Naqvi, 2009; Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, & Cummins, 2008). The growth in Canada of the visible minority population was 26.5% between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). In 2006, the visible minority population in Montréal was 16% and is projected to be at 31% in 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2010). Indigenous populations have the highest birthrates in Canada and provinces such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba will soon be “predominantly aboriginal” (Chambers, 2003, p. 222). These shifts in demographics within a changing Canadian society require new ways of thinking about curriculum and pedagogy, in order to create spaces that are inclusive for all children. As noted by researchers in literacy education, we need to consider the “profound shifts both in terms of who the students sitting in contemporary classrooms are and how contemporary social and educational theory are redefining literacy, expanding our appreciation of social, intellectual and semiotic resources students bring from multiple fields of communicative practice” (Taylor et al., 2008, p. 271). Newcomer students in Canada face the challenge of establishing their identities within mainstream schools while they “may feel a loss of their own culture and yet a pressure to maintain it” (Naqvi, 2009, p. 44).

Given the diversity of contemporary classrooms, there is much potential for educators and researchers to engage young children in reading literature as one way to open spaces and conversations related to the rights of the child and human rights. Since the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), educators and researchers are paying more attention to the lives of children. The Convention has been ratified in 194 countries around the world, including Canada. Article 17 of the Convention outlines the child’s right to “access information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health”. Within the UNCRC, this right to access diverse information and material specifically

includes children's literature as stated in Section C of Article 17 that the state parties shall work to "[e]ncourage the production and dissemination of children's books". The stories that are made available and selected for reading in the classroom have an impact on the way that children learn and grow together as a community. Genishi and Dyson (2009) note that,

Children can listen to, read, talk about, and enact a diversity of texts, among them, formal letters, playground rhymes, and literary dialogue in varied vernaculars... without such opportunities, children may develop the misperception that *voices like theirs* do not belong in stories. (p. 30, emphasis added)

Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) describes her own perception that she did not belong in stories when the literature she was reading as a child in Nigeria only featured white characters and how her identity as a writer shifted when she found texts by African authors.

Classroom library shelves filled with stories from rich and diverse sources have the potential to breathe life and energy into the community of readers. When teachers share a story that deals with a topic related to children's rights, inviting children to respond and engage, new ideas and understandings of what it means to be human and to live together can emerge. Kyo Maclear (2016) draws on Rinaldo Walcott's argument that in literature, "critical diversity seeks to not just populate our various arenas with one-dimensional encounters. It seeks to provide encounters that strike deeply at the core of what it means to be human" (para. 15). In other words, it is important to provide young readers with literature that fosters a broad understanding of humanity.

Within Canada, researchers, authors, artists, and activists are working to bring diverse literature to children—and there is much work to be done. It is through this research that I hope to shed light on the role of stories for children that acknowledge their rights and freedoms. By participating in the experience of reading and responding to stories that reflect the diversity of voices and narratives in a changing Canadian society, and by discussing issues that are relevant within diverse communities, children may have increased opportunities to become active and engaged participants in their own learning, contributing to an increased sense of agency, belonging, and identity. And yet, there are challenges, as many teachers may not have access to contemporary

Canadian literature and they may not know how to approach difficult topics such as racism and discrimination, particularly related to human rights education. A survey of Canadian teachers revealed that educators across Canada feel that they need more resources to teach human rights, particularly for young children (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2013).

Sumara (2002) argues “that literary experience is a place. By learning to attend to its details, readers can improve the quality of their lived experiences” (p. xivv). Indeed, through this study, I hope to contribute to research on children’s experiences through attending to the voices of contemporary Canadian authors and illustrators so that we may have a better understanding of the role of stories in children’s lives within diverse classroom communities. Chambers (2003) calls on educational researchers to “map a topography for Canadian curriculum theory, one that is begun at home but works on behalf of everyone” (p. 233). As noted by Myers (2014), children “create, through the stories they’re given, an atlas of their world, of their relationships to others, of their possible destinations” (para. 7). The stories children read become the maps that guide them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My journey in pursuing this doctoral research was guided by my experiences in teaching in classrooms, both with young children in kindergarten and with pre-service teachers in language and literacy courses at university. This study also builds on my experiences as a research assistant working with pre-service and practicing teachers reading Canadian literature for social justice, as well as my previous research on bilingual literacy in immersion classrooms in my Master’s thesis study (Phipps, 2010). Upon reviewing the literature in theories of childhood studies and literacy, my research inquiry has been informed by the work of scholars who carefully and sensitively consider the ways that children make meaning through engagements with visual images and stories as well as create their own representations (Anning & Ring, 2004; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Kress, 1997; McArdle & Bold, 2013; Paley, 1997). This qualitative study sets out to explore the following broad question,

- *How may listening to children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books, in word and image, inform our understanding of young children's engagements with literature in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms?*

Then, within this question, I consider the following sub-question,

- *What is the role of the teacher in supporting children's engagements with picture books?*

As a researcher, I have reflected on how my own life story has led me to these research questions.

In the next section, I describe my experiences from childhood to becoming a teacher that have contributed to my passion for stories and the interconnections between literature, place, and identity.

MY STORY: HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

I was born and raised on what I have come to acknowledge as Treaty 8 land, the traditional territory of the Sicannie, Slavey, Dana-Zaa, Cree and Saulteau First Nations (Treaty 8 Tribal Association, 2015). My family lived on a small farm in northeastern rural British Columbia, in the heart of Peace River country. Trees and fields surround a family home built by my parents. A long winding tree-lined driveway leads to our house. My parents were both raised near urban centres (my mother in the UK and my father in Montréal). They dreamed of living in a quiet and remote place, in the tranquility of nature. A love of travelling, languages, and cultures runs in my family. Hearing many stories of languages, cultures, and places, often the topics of discussion around our dinner table, contributed to my curiosity in learning about the world. Although my parents met in the mountains of southern BC, they migrated north in the late-70s and my father worked as a carpenter. One of his first jobs was working on building the Native Friendship Centre in the Northern community of the Peace River. My childhood experiences of home and family, in Canada and the UK, contributed to my own sense of transnational identity and my awareness of a sense of place.

I learned from a young age that home can be in different places, and as my mother would often say (and her mother told her), "Home is where the heart is!" We often had visitors at our house in the country and we also occasionally spent our summers visiting relatives, in the UK and in Canada. Relatives from the UK would come to stay for several weeks. Those visits made me more

aware of my geographical location as I saw Northern British Columbia through the perspective of visitors. Alternatively, when we would spend other summers in Wales, I recall the joy of walking the hills in the countryside of North Wales (*Cymru*), amidst the wild and woolly sheep and the heather-covered mountains. Returning from one summer holiday in Wales, I wrote in my primary school notebook all about my grandparents' house *Pensychnant* in the Sychnant Pass (it is now a protected nature conservation area). I wrote about the Welsh landscape: stonewalls, the garden paths with my grandfather's flowers, the sheep on the hills nearby. My teacher, Miss R., wrote in the margin asking about the word *Pensychnant*, which I explained to her was Welsh! I remember the feeling of pride in her asking about my writing and the place that was a part of my identity. I had a few friends my age in Wales who became my pen pals and we wrote letters, sent by airmail, over the years of my childhood.

In school, I remember being intrigued by the non-mainstream languages spoken by children in my class. For instance, children living on the reserve would attend special activities to take part in Dane-Zaa (Beaver) cultural activities. These language and cultural activities were led by a Dane-Zaa staff member in our school and took place outside of the classroom down the hallway. I recall, as a young student, walking by and being curious about the activities that took place quietly in the small room. I also recall children speaking German translating for one another in my kindergarten class, often in whispers, in order to facilitate understanding during playtime or when the teachers gave instructions. One of my fondest memories of elementary school is the trip that we took in Grade Four to the Doig River First Nation (Dane-Zaa), in the community, where we participated in learning about traditional knowledge and stories with elders. I also recall running and playing with one of my classmates, and younger pre-school aged children, who lived on the reserve. In reflection now, I wonder about the possibilities for cross-cultural learning if the language and activities would have been more integrated into our mainstream classroom. I recall being pleased when we started to have instruction in French as a Second Language in elementary school, and thoroughly enjoyed the communicative language activities including music and language games. When I began to read in French, it was as though another world opened up to me. Language learning became my life-long passion.

Living on a farm in Northern Canada, and spending extensive time in the countryside in Wales, meant lots of time outdoors and having a strong connection to nature. The forest outside our house provided hours of serious exploration in the summer, with winding paths and places to hide-and-seek. At the end of our curving driveway, we would leave our bikes and enter the forest, also known as the 'Magical Kingdom'.

I can attribute my fascination with stories largely to the fact that we did not have a television at home in the early years of my childhood. My two sisters and I were encouraged by our parents to use our imagination in creative play and activities, and to read, read, read. A family of avid readers, books can be found in almost every room of our home. A worn and tattered set of Encyclopedias my father found at a garage sale, atlases, maps, fairy tales, novels, comics, *National Geographic* magazines, children's cookbooks (one titled *Let me in the kitchen!*), art history books from my mother's college studies, my father's books on farming and sustainable living, bird books, *My Heart Soars* by Chief Dan George (1974). Before I started school, I watched in admiration when my older sister would be engrossed in reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* series and my mother was reading *War and Peace*. Once I learned to read in Grade One, I devoured *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* (Cleary, 1981), *Ramona the Brave* (Cleary, 1975) and the rest of the series by Beverly Cleary, and later on I read *Anastasia Krupnik* (Lowry, 1981), *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964), *Pippi Longstocking* (Lindgren, 1978), *Matilda* (Dahl, 1988), and historical fiction such as *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989). I also read to my younger sister from her picture books such as Kathy Stinson's (1986) *Red is Best* (which I equally loved).

Our creativity was developed through games we played both outdoors and indoors. Occasionally, we phoned our friends living on neighbouring farms to meet up on our bicycles and play together. Our houses were about one or two miles apart from one another, so the journey itself was an adventure that required planning and energy. One summer, we had an ongoing and never-ending game of Monopoly happening in the living room. At other times, our living room was transformed into a fort of blankets.

At an early age, I learned the importance of having a quality work space for creating, drawing, and writing. My father built my sisters and I small wooden tables and chairs for each of

us on our third birthday. They were all the same size and each one had our name painted in red letters on the back of the chair. Mine said TAMMY (for Tamsen), as that is my middle name and I was called Tamsen until I was in Grade One (when I started officially going by the name of Heather as it appeared on the roll call and the teacher asked me what name I would use). Before I started kindergarten, I set up the table and created an ‘office space’ at home on my wooden table where I drew pictures, made necklaces with beads, and carefully learned to print my name. I loved to organize all my crayons and materials carefully. We had a special cupboard for art supplies: paints, brushes, coloured paper, scissors, and craft magazines. Our mother would proudly put our artwork on the fridge or the kitchen wall and around the house.

Music also played a significant role in my childhood literacy experiences, both at home and at school. At home, we played the piano, listened to records, and sang. At school, I joined the choir. I also had a small Fisher-Price tape recorder that we used to record ourselves telling stories and singing. We listened to records on the small blue record player: Fairy Tales, The Chipmunks, and Peter, Paul and Mary. *Puff the Magic Dragon* was a song that we listened to over and over again on the record player. We particularly liked this verse (especially as my older sister’s name is Autumn) and we danced around the house singing to the song,

Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea

And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honah Lee,

Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea

And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honah Lee.

Dressing up was another favorite pastime. An eclectic collection of clothing was kept in a wooden box in the basement: silk dresses with zippers, hats of various sizes, velvet jackets, and tall boots with buttons. We sometimes dressed as characters and then came to ‘visit’ our parents, who would greet us at the door and welcome us in for lemonade and cookies.

Along with the dressing up and pretend play, we created improvised dances and plays. These were performed ‘onstage’ in the living room or outdoors on the front lawn. Our audience would be our parents or visiting relatives. For summer performances, we pulled up lawn chairs for the guests.

After one dance show that we performed on a hot afternoon, my grandmother said, “*Well, you don’t need a television, you have all the entertainment you need here*”. Later on, when my grandfather bought a video camera, we began to film our performances and create our own movies. One of those, filmed on the beaches of Seal Bay, Vancouver Island, was called *CinderEmma* (titled after my younger sister Emma). Oh, how those childhood years have fuelled my imagination!

At the heart of this thesis is a concern for the ways in which young children, in reading literature, responding to texts, and sharing their own stories, construct their multiple identities, contributing to a sense of belonging and community, both in the classroom and beyond. As noted by Meek (1982),

The picture book lets the child’s mental imagery entwine with the artist’s so that both become fused with his memory and mental pictures, what we call ‘the mind’s eye’. Good readers develop this habit of carrying pictures in the head as well as recognizing words on a page. (p. 98)

Meek (1982) also observed how young children, around age five, are capable of understanding complex issues through stories,

We cannot explain to a five-year-old’s dream imagery, the hauntings of fear and guilt or why it is possible to believe that the Gingerbread Man is real. Nor can we discuss adult foibles or the complications of our multicultural society in ways that the young can understand as debatable issues. But they can feel an adult’s frustration if he is Raymond Briggs’ Father Christmas on his rounds, and a picture book by Ezra Jack Keats—*Whistle for Willie*—will make the point about a child whose skin is not white. Anthony Browne’s *Look What I’ve Got!* is saying that imagination is worth more than possessions. (p. 97)

Stories offer a space to make sense of the human experience in a complex world; this research study involves teachers and children reading and responding to stories together. The picture books we read together invited us as readers to imagine, feel, wonder, dream, create, and live through the aesthetic experience of engaging with literature. I believe that stories have the power to

be transformative. As novelist Kamala Das writes, “Ask the books that I read why I changed” (1976, p. 52).

BECOMING A LANGUAGE AND LITERACY TEACHER

I am grateful for all of those childhood years that certainly so richly contributed to my passion and love of words, images, and stories. My experiences as a classroom teacher for six years, both in French Second Language and French immersion classrooms in Alberta and in teaching English as a Second Language within Francophone schools in Québec have sparked my interest in stories and literature in the classroom.

In my French immersion kindergarten classroom, I read stories that were visually rich and that centred on children’s experiences such as *Stella, reine des neiges* (Gay, 2000) and *Le rouge c’est bien mieux!* (Stinson, 1986). I also discovered the joy that children experienced in participating in metafictional texts such as *Chester* (Watt, 2007), where our shared read-alouds of the French version of this story often resulted in roaring laughter among the kindergarten children.

Being introduced to the work of Vivian Paley had a transformative influence on my teaching as her respect for children and their words resonated with my own perspectives and pedagogical practices. I began to read Paley’s books and to share them with my classroom assistant. Listening to the stories that children told in my classroom was an important part of my language and literacy teaching.

The children in my classroom came from diverse families and brought many rich stories to the classroom. It was through our classroom storytelling that we got to know each other. Each day of the week, a family member or friend of the family would volunteer in my classroom, providing opportunities for families to be involved in the storytelling and sharing of cultures...learning from families from Venezuela, China, South Africa, the Philippines, and First Nations. As a classroom teacher, I valued the relationships built with families over the years.

I came to graduate school with many questions as to how educators may integrate literature in the curriculum to spark interest and provide meaningful learning experiences that connect to the

lives of students. I began the M.A. program in Second Language Education with a desire to learn more about teaching languages through literature. My studies in the graduate program stimulated my thinking about literature and literacies, as I began to expand my own understanding of the possibilities of educational theories related to issues of gender, class, race, language, and agency. In my first semester studying at McGill, I saw an announcement for a research assistant position on a project that was exploring pre-service teachers' perceptions of identity in Canadian multicultural picture books, with a focus on indigenous children's picture books. My interest in cultures and literatures, as well as a desire to learn more about teaching with indigenous picture books, initially drew me to this work. While I worked for Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson on this project, co-leading workshops and assisting with focus groups, transcribing, and data analysis, I started to read many more Canadian children's authors such as Rachna Gilmore, Tomson Highway, Rukhsana Khan, Dany Laferrière, George Littlechild, Chieri Uegaki, and Paul Yee. It was through this project that I was introduced to the concept of 'shifting the canon' in order to include more diverse books in the classroom (Bradford, 2007). While working as a research assistant for Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson on a second SSHRC funded study, exploring pedagogy through literature for social justice, I encountered the illustrated novel *Fatty Legs* (Jordan & Pokiak-Fenton, 2010). I was amazed to learn that the authors, including one who attended residential school in the North, lives in the Peace River area where I grew up. I have increasingly included social justice literature into my language and literacy teaching with pre-service teachers at McGill and in courses with teachers in Cree, Kanien'kehà: ka, Naskapi, and Inuit indigenous communities.

Montréal is a rich context for researching with children's literature, as there are many libraries containing rich multicultural and multilingual collections, local bookstores that specialize in children's books, and literary events celebrating the talents of authors and illustrators throughout the year. In preparing for this doctoral research project and throughout the process of the dissertation, I have enjoyed spending countless days finding treasures at La Grande Bibliothèque, the Bibliothèques de la Ville de Montréal, as well as the children's literature sections of the McGill University Library in the Curriculum Resource Centre. I also spent many of my weekends over the years I lived in Montréal

browsing in the independent children's bookstores *Babar en Ville* and *Livres Babar*. I borrowed copies of books from the various libraries, brought some copies of my own personal collection, and ordered new copies for teachers. One of the challenges that I faced in the research was that many of the French children's books go out of print very quickly in Canada, and are therefore not available. While finding French children's literature that addresses issues of social justice is an added challenge, it is also rewarding to find books that are relevant for teaching in today's diverse classrooms. Searching for thought-provoking, creative, and stimulating books for the project was an enjoyable experience. Indeed, while writing this dissertation, the libraries of Montréal have remained my favourite places in the city and there are always treasures to discover there. I have always enjoyed searching in libraries, and this project enabled me to delve into my passion for children's literature by exploring diverse contemporary Canadian picture books. While in Montréal, I've also had the opportunity to meet with many Canadian authors and hear them speak with passion about their work, including Isabelle Arsenault, Joseph Boyden, Marie-Louise Gay, Nadia Hahn, Tomson Highway, Thomas King, Dany Laferrière, Kyo Maclear, Monique Polak, and Chieri Uegaki. The current study is fuelled by an interest in exploring how children and teachers interact with contemporary Canadian children's literature.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

FIELDWORK

In this fieldwork, I have documented the experiences of children and teachers engaging with Canadian picture books. Lancy (1993) notes that sociologists “conduct a *field study* to document a *community*” (p. 4, emphasis in original). This classroom-based qualitative study, drawing on scholarly work in language and literacy studies, involved collaboration with two French teachers and 64 participating children in Grades One and Two classrooms. I worked with the teachers to select children’s literature by Canadian authors and illustrators. We planned collaboratively to engage children in creative responses to the literature, particularly through visual arts. Lancy (1993) writes that “[t]o be a participant observer means working in the field...Pursuing one’s quarry through the corridors, on the swings, in the board room is unpredictable and complex...” (p. 14-15). Patton (1990) notes that “Field work involves getting one’s hands dirty” (as cited in Lancy, 1993, p. 14). As a participant observer, I was actively involved in the classroom language and literacy activities. On the days I visited the school, my hands were often splattered with paint or coloured by markers after working with the children. During the three-month classroom-based study, from late March until the end of the school year in June, I visited the school at least two days a week during French language arts class.

The data gathering for this study consisted of multiple qualitative and ethnographic methods such as observational fieldnotes during classroom read-alouds, audio-recorded conversations with children during literacy activities, focus group interviews with children, interviews with teachers, and artifacts of children’s drawings and paintings. By documenting children’s responses to picture books over the course of the three-month study, through multiple methods, this study aimed to explore children’s literacy experiences in diverse classrooms.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

CHAPTER ONE: A LOVE OF STORIES

This thesis begins by situating the research inquiry within the context of language and literacy education in Canadian classrooms. I have introduced the research questions exploring children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books. I have provided a personal narrative that details my own life experiences, particularly a life-long interest in literature and place.

CHAPTER TWO:

SEEING AND LISTENING: CHILDREN RESPONDING TO PICTURE BOOKS

This chapter provides a synthesis of the theoretical underpinnings of the research study through a synthesis of the literature on children's engagements with picture books. I draw on theories of visual literacy and current research in children's literature to examine the role of stories in contributing to imagination and creativity among young readers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGIES FOR LISTENING TO

CHILDREN'S VOICES AND THEIR HUNDRED LANGUAGES

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework for the research methodology of the qualitative study. I bring together philosophical concepts central to Reggio Emilia (an early childhood approach developed in Italy) such as the hundred languages of children and the pedagogy of listening, with methodologies developed by childhood researchers and educators that have informed the methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR:

BEING IN THE FIELD: LIVING IN THE MIDST OF STORIES

In Chapter Four I provide a detailed description of the fieldwork within the classrooms. I describe the context of the research, including the school, teachers, and participating children. I outline the methods of data gathering within the fieldwork and provide examples of the various data and data sources. I also explain the process of data analysis of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE:

‘ALL MY IDEAS FLOW’: CHILDREN’S RESPONSES TO PICTURE BOOKS

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the children’s creative responses to picture books. The chapter is organized around the themes that have emerged from my data analysis, portraying the ways children engaged with and responded to picture books, particularly through visual arts such as drawing and painting. In this analysis, I have drawn on theories of visual methodologies (Rose, 2012) and children’s visual work (Kress, 1997; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Mavers, 2011) to consider the ways that children construct meaning through literacy practices (Meek, 1992).

CHAPTER SIX: LISTENING WITH YOUR HEART

In this chapter, I focus on the teachers’ role in supporting children’s engagement with responding to literature. As the teachers engaged aesthetically with picture books, they shared an interest in exploring new ideas with the children. The teachers’ interest in discovering new stories and themes with the children opened possibilities and spaces for rich learning and interactions. The teachers encouraged children to express themselves creatively in response to the literature, thus enabling deeper relationships and conversations to develop in the classroom.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

‘WE’RE ALL PART OF THE STORY’: CHILDREN AND TEACHERS AT PLAY

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the social interactions among the children and teachers engaging with stories and with one another, particularly through visual arts, contributes to vibrant and dynamic learning communities in which children are respected, find their own voices, and learn to respect the voices and stories of others.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

VISUALIZING HOPE: MAPPING POSSIBLE DESTINATIONS

In this chapter, I revisit my research questions and summarize the findings of the study. I discuss the contributions to new knowledge. I also reflect on the implications for pedagogy and research in language and literacy education.

SEEING AND LISTENING: CHILDREN RESPONDING TO PICTURE BOOKS

The truth about stories is, that's all we are.

Thomas King (2003)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I argue that picture books provide rich and meaningful spaces for young children to imagine and explore possibilities for being together in community through engagements with the words and images in visual texts. I begin by exploring theories developed in visual literacy that illustrate how young readers may learn to see, look, and listen in order to engage deeply with literature, particularly picture books. By reviewing work that combines visual literacy and literary response, I describe the kinds of responses children have to literature (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Mackay, 2003; Pantaleo, 2015; Sipe, 2008; Souto-Manning, 2009). I provide an overview of research in the field of picture books that includes theorists who advocate for the recognition of picture books as a unique art form combining both words and images (Bradford, 2007; Burke, 2013; Nodelman, 1988; Nikolajeva, 2010; Short, 2009) as “visual literature” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012). I

explore work in the Canadian context that demonstrates the significance of the growing diversity in contemporary Canadian picture books for young children (Aldana, 2012; Edwards & Saltman, 2010; Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013; Strong-Wilson, 2008) and what opportunities such texts may offer for children in culturally and linguistically diverse Canadian classrooms and how this may contribute to curricula that fosters community building within the context of our contemporary society (Chambers, 2003; Naqvi, 2009; Taylor et al., 2008).

This chapter is divided into three sections. The **first section** is about picture books as a form of visual literacy (that considers children's responses as both social and aesthetic). The **second section** focuses on literature that explores how children respond to picture books and the rights of children to have access to stories from diverse cultures. The **third section** will focus on the pedagogical potential of picture books to enable deep thinking, critical literacy, and community building.

PICTURE BOOKS AND VISUAL LITERACY

NURTURING THE IMAGINATION THROUGH VISUAL ARTS

The imagination is nurtured by encounters with the arts in diverse forms. In our contemporary society, which is an “increasingly visual, image-based culture” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 8), it is worth paying attention to the role of visual literacy in classrooms. As noted by Eisner (1998), “we cannot know through language what we cannot imagine. The image—visual, tactile, auditory—plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning” (p. 15). While educational theorists such as Eisner (1998) and McArdle & Boldt (2013) along with members of The New London Group (1996) advocate for children to have diverse opportunities to explore meaning through various modalities, many have noted that learning opportunities within contemporary classrooms limit the learning potential for children to grow and develop due to the undervaluing of visual arts and visual literacy (Anning & Ring, 2004; Salisbury & Styles, 2012). Educational movements in early childhood, such as Reggio Emilia, have provided innovative examples of how the visual contributes to imagination and wonder.

Reggio Emilia, an approach to preschool education that was developed by educators and families in Italy after the Second World War, has many lessons to teach us about children's languages and early childhood education. Many of the children attending the schools were living in poverty and many of them were undernourished (Malaguzzi, 1998). Furthermore, as Malaguzzi (1998) explains in an interview about the early days of the school, the teachers "learned how alien the standard Italian language was to them, as their families had for generations spoken local dialects" (p. 50). With the help of parents, the educators worked closely within the community to build a program that was based on the cutting-edge idea "that things about children and for children are only learned from children" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 51). This concept resonates strongly with my dissertation focused on Children Speaking with Children (*les enfants qui parlent aux enfants*) through young children's engagements with contemporary literature. In particular, the Reggio Emilia notion of one hundred languages (see also Chapter Three) is related to respecting children's ways of imagining and telling stories.

Vecchi (2004) writes that,

Of all of the different languages, poetic languages have the strongest capacity to maintain a close interconnection between imagination and sensitivity. Ultimately, they can become the most effective antibodies against violence as the most productive means to instill the capacity to listen to the world. (p. 142)

The arts have the potential to create an impact on our society as we imagine possibilities for humanity and gain a deeper understanding of others through aesthetic experiences. When young children have the opportunity to engage with literature in diverse forms, and to express their own ideas, feelings, and emotions in response to works of art, they may feel included and respected as they actively participate in multimodal literacies.

For Eisner, and many others,

Literacy relates to the ability to construe meaning in any of the forms used in the culture to create and convey meaning. What cannot be conveyed or constructed in words is often possible in visual images or in music. Becoming literate in the broad sense means learning how to read these images. (p. 15)

Developing the ability to read images, as noted by Eisner, is a way to increase “the variety and depth of meaning” within our lives (p. 15). Furthermore, Eisner notes that reading a diversity of images contributes to cognitive development while also providing equitable opportunities for children to reach their potential by recognizing the diverse ways in which individuals learn. He writes of the power of the arts to provoke thinking: “We learn to see patterns of light and shadow on a city street by seeing photographs and paintings of such qualities by artists. We come to understand the depth of tragedy by reading novels and seeing plays” (Eisner, 1998, p. 16). It is important that all children have the opportunity to experience the pleasure of the arts, in their full complexity, including with picture books.

PICTURE BOOKS AS VISUAL LITERATURE

Scholars in children’s literature make the clear distinction between picture books and illustrated books (Salisbury & Styles, 2012; Sipe, 2008). The contemporary picture book is,

Defined by its particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words, to convey meaning. In contrast to the illustrated book, where pictures enhance, decorate, and amplify, in the picture book the visual text will often carry much of the narrative responsibility. (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 7)

Nevertheless, the picture book as an art form is not yet fully appreciated, largely due to the fact that “adults who come into contact with the form as parents, teachers, or reviewers will be educated primarily in the verbal rather than visual literature” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 7). In light of this need for adults to be more aware of visual literature to fully appreciate the value of picture books when reading with children, I believe that visual literacy should be included in teacher education courses such as Children’s Literature, as well as be part of ongoing professional development with teachers. Considering the increasingly innovative and complex nature of picture books (Salisbury & Styles, 2012), “a new understanding of this hybrid art form will perhaps begin to emerge” as picture books are gaining appreciation from wider audiences and researchers are interested in how children respond to such texts (p. 7). Visual literature is the recognition of picture books “both as art and as

literature” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 7).

The interplay of the visual and verbal in children’s picture books offer ways of exploring complex ideas through both narratives, thus providing rich opportunities for intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional engagement. Montréal-based Canadian illustrator Isabelle Arsenault worked in collaboration with author Kyo Maclear on the stories *Virginia Wolf* and *Spork* (published by Kids Can Press in English, and translated into French by Fanny Britt and published by Montréal-based *Les Éditions de la Pastèque*). Carter (2013) notes the duality in Arsenault’s illustrations as, “Arsenault possesses a rare ability to capture the innocence and imagination of childhood, while acknowledging the darker fears and insecurities that lurk in the shadow” (p. 15). In an interview with *Quill & Quire*, Arsenault credits her inspiration to living in the city of Montréal,

Montréal is this weird city where you can find a nice building just next to another one that’s ugly. Everything is mixed up...for me, it’s inspiring, and allows liberty to see things your own way. I think it shows in the work and is reflected in its creators.

(Carter, 2013, p. 15)

With this duality of the visual text, the illustrations created by Arsenault offer a rich and challenging aesthetic experience.

Seeing involves thinking about the meaning of the visual images represented in the pictures. As noted by children’s picture book scholars, the visual text of picture books enhances the story by providing visual cues regarding the characters, plot, and setting of the story, often adding further details that are not described in words or verbal text. Illustrators of picture books make use of various artistic features including colour, vectors, lines, framing, perspective, shape, and texture (Serafini, 2014; Sipe, 2008). Burke (2013) observes that “children’s interactions with visuals of picture books shows a sophisticated ability to identify the meaning of the text, as it is carried in modes that are visual, spatial, with texture and colour, and so forth” (p. 139).

Salisbury and Styles (2012) note that the picture book has evolved over the past 130 years since British children’s author and illustrator Richard Caldecott “began to elevate the role of the image in the narrative” (p. 7). Caldecott, who wrote numerous picture books including *The House*

that *Jack Built* (1878) and *The Babes in the Woods* (1879), influenced the style and format of the modern picture book (Children's Literature Review, 2005). Children's author Maurice Sendak (1989) described the influence of Caldecott,

Caldecott's work heralds the beginning of the modern picture book. He devised an ingenious juxtaposition of picture and word, a counterpoint that never happened before. Words are left out—but the picture says it. Pictures are left out—but the word says it. In short, it is the invention of the picture book. (p. 21)

Theorists studying picture books have noted that picture books require that children engage in meaning-making across modes such as visual and verbal (Burke, 2013; Pantaleo, 2015; Serafini, 2014). As “readers-viewers” (Serafini, 2012, p. 152; Pantaleo, 2015) engage in reading a picture book, we engage our senses in experiencing the multiple modes of communication, in reading both the words and images.

VISUAL LITERACY AND LITERARY RESPONSE

Seppänen (2006) defines visual literacy as “the skills to understand and critically interpret the function and meanings of different visual representations and orders” (as cited in Burke, 2013, p. 139). Visual literacy has interdisciplinary roots and is now becoming an integral component of multiliteracies education and image-based research. By defining children as readers-viewers of picture books, we take into consideration their developing knowledge and skills in perceiving, representing, and interpreting visual texts (Burke, 2013; Kress, 1997; Pantaleo, 2015; Salisbury & Styles, 2012; Sipe, 2008).

Literacy is a social and cultural practice that is relational, situated, and dialogical. Since the 1980's, the field of New Literacy Studies (hereafter NLS) has challenged dominant and traditional notions of literacy as skills to a broader view of literacy as situated practice that varies within diverse contexts and settings. Scholars in The New London Group (1996) developed ‘multiliteracies’ as an approach to literacy pedagogy that considers the multiplicity of modes of communication and ways of meaning-making, including the visual, audio, verbal, etc. This theory of multiliteracies pedagogy is related to children's responses to picture books, as researchers consider how children interpret the multimodal communicative modes of pictures books.

Sipe (2008) is an advocate for children's experiences of the art in picture books; he observes that illustrations are central to the picture book format and that readers gain a deeper understanding of the texts through a consideration of visual aesthetics. Thus, the reader-viewer must be engaged in the process of reading the images. By reflecting on the ways that children engage with visual images, we can enhance literacy instruction. Colomer et al. (2010) note in *New Directions for Picture Book Research* that "picture book illustration is a subtle and complex art form that can communicate on many levels and leave a deep imprint on a child's consciousness" (p. 1).

Theorists have explored the ways that readers interpret and respond to literary texts. Rosenblatt (1982) describes reading as a transaction between the text and the reader, and context, and highlights the importance of *aesthetic* reading, which involves participating in the story as the reader identifies with the characters and feels the sensory images and emotions of the text. Rosenblatt's ideas concerning the transactional process of reading and aesthetic response are particularly relevant when considering children's engagements with literature. For Rosenblatt, children need to be encouraged to have aesthetic experiences with literature in schools and to find pleasure in reading. It is through aesthetic experiences with texts that readers will experience human emotions and reflect on the themes presented in the texts.

Sipe (2008) argues that literary understanding necessarily is sequential, as readers have a personal "lived-through" experience with a text prior to engaging in discussion and "public aspects of sense-making" (p. 59; see also Rosenblatt, 2004). The idea of both personal experiences and public conversations (literature circles) with children's literature provides an opportunity for children to relate their own personal experiences to the story and to deepen their understanding of the text through conversation with their peers and teacher.

CONTEMPORARY PICTURE BOOKS

Scholars have examined contemporary picture books from various angles, such as the relationship and interplay between words and images in texts (Nodelman, 1988; Nikolajeva, 2010), representations of home in Canadian literature (Reimer, 2008), and the role of narratives in

postcolonial societies (Bradford, 2007). Researchers have also explored the use of multicultural and social justice literature with teachers in the Canadian context, both in-service (Strong-Wilson, 2008) and pre-service (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013).

Studies have explored young children's responses to literature in classroom contexts, contributing to our understanding of the complex ways that children engage aesthetically and intellectually with texts (Arizple & Styles, 2003; Naqvi, 2009; Pantaleo, 2015; Sipe, 2008). While reading a picture book, the young reader brings "background information, previous experiences, and a whole range of sociocultural issues to the text, and these interact with both the words and images to make them come alive" (Evans, 2009, p. 102). This experience enables children to relate their knowledge(s) and personal lives to the stories as they enter the world of the characters in the story. As Pantaleo (2015) observes, the process of reading images or visual texts is deeply embedded in sociocultural contexts and histories (see also Jewitt, 2009). Researchers are paying more attention to the visual elements of picture books and how children engage with meaning-making and interpreting these texts, which also relates to an increased focus on multimodality.

Anthony Browne's picture books, which have been examined in various studies with children (Pantaleo, 2015; Rabey, 2003), serve as excellent examples of how visual literature can prompt rich responses from readers-viewers. Browne's creative work in his picture books is highly sophisticated and complex, demonstrating his respect for the child readers-viewers. At the 2012 Congress of the International Board on Books for Young People in London, UK, Browne spoke about his belief that children understand drawings. According to Browne (2012),

Children actually know what drawing is about. Drawing, in my opinion, isn't about looking at a glass of water and making a picture of it so it looks like a photograph.

Drawing is about *telling* something and instinctively children know that.

Salisbury and Styles (2012) point out that the challenges present in postmodern picture books indicate the respect that the authors and illustrators have "for their young audience by assuming they will work hard to tease out meaning and find the book rewarding" (p. 76). Perhaps the key idea here is the notion that children are *capable* of reading and understanding complex ideas in literature:

“Children...will tolerate ambiguities, peculiarities, and things illogical; will take them into their unconscious and deal with them as best they can...” (Sendak, 1989, as cited in Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 75).

What does this mean for visual literacy in the early childhood classroom? Educational theorists have argued for an increased emphasis on visual arts within the curriculum to enable children to communicate, imagine, and express ideas (Eisner, 1998; Serafini, 2014). Nikolajeva (2010) has pointed to the multimodality that is required to interpret picture books where “meaning is produced by the synergy of word and image” (p. 32). While numerous studies exist on the theoretical aspects of picture books, there is considerably less work being done to explore children’s response to and engagements with picture books (Nikolajeva, 2010; Sipe, 2008). Young children could be defined as children from birth to nine years old (Canadian Association for Young Children, 2014). In this review of literature, I am primarily focused on young children between the ages three and nine years old who are attending preschool or primary school, although some of the relevant studies I have reviewed also include children aged ten to twelve.

CHILDREN’S RESPONSES TO PICTURE BOOKS

In recent years, scholars have explored children’s literary understanding of picture books (Evans, 2009; Mackay, 2003; Sipe, 2008), dual language picture books (Naqvi, 2009), feminist picture books (Davies, 2003), wordless picture books (Arizpe, Colemer, & Martinez-Roldán, 2014; Terrusi, 2014) and readings of the visual in picture books (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Rabey, 2003) including metafictional texts (Pantaleo, 2015).

Arizpe and Styles (2003) have investigated the way that children read visual texts. In a two-year study of children’s responses to contemporary picture books, Arizpe and Styles’ qualitative research revealed the complex processes involved in the reading of picture books. Drawing on theories of reader-response, cognitive psychology, and visual literacy, their study focused on the ways that young children respond to texts. Rather than the traditional literacy research on reading and writing, they looked at how children respond verbally and visually to texts. The picture books

included in this study were *The Tunnel* (1989) and *Zoo* (1994) by Anthony Browne and *Lily Takes a Walk* by Satoshi Kitamura. A focus on visual literacy and children's responses to visual texts demonstrated that when engaged in discussions surrounding picture books "many children *fly* intellectually" (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 241). A very interesting aspect of the study was how the children expressed their own thoughts and feelings through the drawings they created in response to texts, particularly when revisiting the stories over time. One of the teachers in the study wrote that the children were observant of the facial expressions and body language in the story *Zoo*. When first reading *Zoo*, the teacher described how,

Only a few children were able to articulate these feelings in their drawings...However, on revisiting *Zoo*, I was intrigued to see that the children now had the confidence and skills to depict some of the more challenging and complicated images from the book. (Rabey, 2003, p. 135)

Margaret Mackay (2003) describes the process of reading a picture book as performativity, since "two streams of information must merge and ignite into life in ways that transcend the limits of particular sentences and images" (p. 101). She studied how pairs of children, aged approximately ten to twelve years old, engaged with the visual text *Shortcut* (Macauley, 1995). In her study, one of the children noted, "That's the most educational book I've ever read. Well, as the most thinking book" (p. 104). This comment from a child demonstrates that discussions of picture books can be thought-provoking for young readers, especially when they are encouraged to pay attention to both the visual and written text.

Rabey (2003), a teacher and art specialist who collaborated on the study with Arizpe and Styles, focused on the children's drawings in response to the picture book *Zoo* by Anthony Browne (1994). Her classroom study with four- and five-year-old children illustrated the way in which children communicated through drawing as they "reflect their responses to the visual stimuli" they encountered in picture books (p. 115). As a teacher-researcher, Rabey described how she used the book *Zoo* by Anthony Browne with her students, forming a mini-project in which "the children were given the opportunity to look at and discuss the illustrations in great detail and make their own

‘zoo’ stories through play and art and craft” (p. 118). Their pictures revealed that they understood the central theme of the story, as their drawings depicted being “trapped in cages” and “children highlighted the contrast between the world inside and outside the cages” (p. 119). As Rabey states, “young children can interpret, communicate and comprehend the visual—beyond what they might be assumed to know. The young artists in my class came to a deeper understanding through their own visual explorations” (p. 138). By reading and looking at the pictures, with focused attention on the details of the pictures and meanings, the children were able to critically discuss the moral issues of how animals are treated in a zoo. Their thoughts were articulated both in conversation and in their drawings. This study offers us insight into the value of spending time on detailed analysis of picture books with children, as well as providing children with the opportunity to draw and make their own stories.

In recent work with migrant children in multilingual contexts of the UK, Spain, Italy, and USA, Arizpe et al. (2014) illustrate the power of the visual narrative to provide an inclusive experience for second- and third-generation migrant children to read and respond to a multimodal text, the wordless graphic novel *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. Through the international Journeys Project in Glasgow, children aged ten to twelve and their teachers were invited to participate in the visual literacy project and parents were also invited to learn about the work. In Catalonia, the children participating in the Journeys project were aged six to sixteen. In Arizona, the children were between the ages of ten and eleven. By reading wordless books with migrant children in different multilingual contexts, the research demonstrates how a community of readers is created through experiences with visual literature.

Terrusi (2014) also describes how children actively participate in reading wordless picture books in a way that enables them to reflect on the rights and needs of children. In recognition of the International Day of Children’s Rights, Terrusi engaged children in reading the wordless picture book *The Arrival* and asked the children to place sticky notes on the pages where they noticed illustrations that depicted the rights and needs of children. At the IBBY Congress in México City, Terrusi (2014) noted the power of wordless books to convey a deeply rich experience, as the details of the visual

narrative conveys meaning that is not possible in a verbal narrative: “Life is done in little details. It is very difficult to do it in words”.

Pantaleo’s (2015) classroom-based study with Grade Two and Three students in an urban context in British Columbia, Canada, focused on children’s “development in visual meaning-making skills and competencies by focusing on...elements of visual art and design in picture books” including physical aspects of picture books, colour, point of view, typography, framing, line perspective, and narrative structures (p. 8). The texts in Pantaleo’s study included the wordless picture books *Tuesday* (Wiesner, 1991), *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), *Flotsam* (Wiesner, 2006), and picture books *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998), *Chester* (Watt, 2007), *Interrupting Chicken* (Stein, 2010) and *NO BEARS* (McKinlay, 2012). Pantaleo describes how the children in her study were introduced to the elements of visual art and design, as they were encouraged to “consider the ‘ingredients’ artists use when creating their illustrations” (p. 10), as a way of adapting an “aesthetic stance to the literature” (p. 9). Pantaleo describes how the children were introduced to the concepts of visual art through activities such as: working with squares of colour to explore secondary, complementary, warm, and cool colours; playing with variations of typography; and exploring the perspectives and points of view in texts through discussions and looking at examples from the various texts.

Pantaleo (2015) notes that children’s experiences with picture books, particularly through pedagogy that encouraged children to pay attention to the artwork, enabled children to become interpreters. She notes that these opportunities enabled children “to learn to see and talk about visual qualities” (Eisner, 1982, p. 12, as cited in Pantaleo, 2015, p. 23). These engagements with literature contributed to the children’s participation in verbally expressing their thoughts regarding the texts,

The students’ developing schemata about elements of visual art and design affected their growing agency and confidence to engage in deep thinking, make inferences, and propose informed interpretation of the artwork. The students’ use of metalanguage that they were taught during the unit of instruction reflected their awareness and understanding of the semiotic resources available to artists to create and communicate meaning. (p. 23)

Literacy practices grounded in multiliteracies pedagogy and NLS consider the ways in which children engage actively in creating and co-constructing meaning. I argue that this is closely connected to the rights of children to have rich experiences with a wide range of picture books and to respond creatively to texts. As recognized in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, children have the right to freedom of expression, which includes,

Freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (Article 13)

Contemporary children's literature offers many avenues for children to explore and construct meaning. In the next section, I will discuss the potential for diversifying literature on classroom shelves and in literacy activities while engaging children and classroom communities in developing critical thinking and imagination.

PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL FOR READING: VISUAL LITERATURE IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

Looking at the images in picture books, particularly texts addressing issues of social justice (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013), can enable the reader-viewer to connect to the text on an emotional and intellectual level through the aesthetic experience of *seeing*. This is particularly important when reading contemporary picture books, as the texts can offer new ways of defining our identities. For instance, recent Canadian picture books such as *Coyote Columbus Story* by Thomas King with illustrations by Kent Monkman or *Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged* by Jody Nyasha Warner (2010) with illustrations by Richard Rudnicki disrupt hegemonic notions of belonging and identity in Canadian society. These are counter-stories that present important perspectives as they portray discrimination and injustice in Canadian history (Bradford, 2007; Howard, 2013). Canadian literacy researchers in *Reading Diversity through Canadian Picture Books* (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013) describe how contemporary literature has changed the literary landscape in recent years,

Newer perspectives in Canadian cultural criticism have challenged former notions of a metanarrative in the literary field and interrogated notions of whiteness as the defining landscape of Canadian literature. This re-defining of Canada's unified story into a postmodern bricolage of competing traditions, histories, re-tellings and re-imaginings has emerged from a variety of sources, including writers and illustrators of European descent, immigrants of colour, and Aboriginal peoples. (p. 6)

We can see the power of visual images in examples of Canadian picture books. For example, *Shi-shi-etko* by Indigenous (Salish and Metis) author Nicola Campbell (2005), illustrated by Kim Lafave, tells the moving story of a young First Nations girl in her home community in British Columbia surrounded by her loving family before she leaves for residential school. Warm and gentle colours are used to portray the love and strong bonds of her family and her connection to the natural environment before she leaves for the Indian Residential School. In another Canadian picture book by Chieri Uegaki and illustrated by Stéphane Jorish, *Suki's Kimono*, we see the joy in Suki's movements and expression as she dances in front of her class while recalling her memory of the Japanese festival she attended with her grandmother. The visual images in such contemporary Canadian stories are very effective in illustrating the emotions and feelings of the characters. They also evoke critical and emotional response in the reader to provoke new understandings (Strong-Wilson & Phipps, 2013).

Burke (2013) discusses the importance of composition and artistic elements of design, including colour and media, in the illustrations of Canadian picture books. She writes, "the interpretation of colour comes quite naturally to children as seen in expressions of emotions such as 'blue' for sadness, 'red' for excitement or anger, 'yellow' for calmness, or 'green' for growth" (p. 141; see also Burke 2002). Burke (2013) describes how Alanna, a pre-service teacher in Newfoundland, and her elementary students who read the book *Flags* (Trottier, 1999) were deeply moved by the artistic elements of the visual text that portrays the history of the Japanese internment camps in Canada during the Second World War. Burke (2013) highlights how "racial awareness and teaching pedagogies to support an acceptance of multiculturalism and social justice" were important issues

for the student teacher, Alanna, who describes her children's responses,

They liked the picture. It was the colour. It was the texture in it as well. It was like sand and rocks and plants and things. And they liked how it looked real. That's how they described it to me. But one girl said to me, I think it was here the double page, the picture looks sad. I am assuming she was relating to the darker colours but not necessarily. "He looks very sad because he is going away and they are friends, and like, my friend when she moved away was really sad the day before she left." So probably the colour might have, ...with the sun setting, ending his time here. I think that is what she meant by that. (Student teacher cited in Burke, 2013, p. 150)

Nikolajeva (2003) tells us how powerful the visual images in picture books are as she observes, "Visual images can sometimes be more efficient in conveying the characters' inner life, especially vague, unuttered wishes, fears, daydreams, and other complex psychological states" (p. 46). For example, when a character in the story is facing a challenging situation or dilemma, the emotions are conveyed through the illustration evoking a response from the reader/viewer: "This continual back-and-forth and most fruitful reading of picture books are never straightforwardly linear, but rather involve a lot of rereading, turning to previous pages, reviewing, slowing down, and reinterpreting" (Sipe, 2008, p. 27).

To illustrate the point above regarding how picture books convey meaning through a combination of words and pictures that require careful reading, I will draw on an example from the contemporary Canadian picture book *Virginia Wolf* (2012) by Kyo Maclear, illustrated by Montréal artist Isabelle Arsenault. The story begins with Vanessa recounting the terrible day when her sister woke up growling like a wolf and doing strange things: "*Un jour, ma soeur Virginia s'est levée d'humeur féroce. Elle s'est mise à grogner comme un loup. Et à faire des choses étranges.*" The written text does not describe what the strange things are, but the reader-viewer can gather through looking closely at the image, that the alarm clock has been knocked over or thrown from the bed as it lies shattered in pieces along with flowers fallen from a bouquet. We also see that the ears of the wolf are sticking out from under the covers of the bed, suggesting that Vanessa's sister is actually a

wolf. Furthermore, the somber palette of colours used in this image convey a sense of darkness, such as one may feel on a gray morning. There is a tension in the image and words, as the reader senses that Virginia is upset. Meanwhile, the setting of the child's bedroom depicts a warm and safe environment, with plenty of books to read, a teacup placed at the bedside table, and a playful painting of a rabbit above the fireplace. Thus, the details in the image, combined with the words, allow the reader-viewer to interpret and imagine. Furthermore, the images and the written word may prompt the reader-viewer to ask questions and to make interpretations: *Why is Virginia in a bad mood? What are the strange things happening? How will Vanessa react?*



Figure 1. Image from *Virginia Wolf* illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault.¹

¹ Image from *Virginia Wolf* by Kyo Maclear and Isabelle Arsenault. Illustrations © 2012 Isabelle Arsenault.

When we look closely at the images and words, as readers-viewers, we may make many different interpretations in exploring the meanings expressed by the author and illustrator of the picture book. *Virginia Wolf*, as described above, is one example of a contemporary Canadian picture book that is rich with complexity and artistic style in the design, artistic presentation, and written narration from the perspective of a young girl, Vanessa, who describes the feelings of her sister Virginia. This text, I would argue, belongs in the category of texts written for children that Canadian critics and editors are calling the ‘Golden Age’ of Canadian picture books (Cerny, 2015). The innovation and creativity of contemporary book creators has brought international recognition to Canadian picture books. Saltman notes that the “exciting new, energetic, sophisticated creators are bringing edgier visions to their work” (as cited in Cerny, 2015, para. 25).

Considering the distinctive nature of contemporary picture books, such as *Virginia Wolf*, that deal with complex issues such as mental health and loving relationships between sisters, I would like to return to the question of how children respond to and interpret such texts. Given the diversity of Canada’s classroom communities we must consider what stories are available for children, whose stories are told (Strong-Wilson, 2008), and how children respond to reading stories by contemporary Canadian authors and illustrators.

INVITING CHILDREN TO BE READERS AND ‘STRONG POETS’

Meek (1992) writes, “Borges says that reading is ‘guided dreaming’, and the poets never cease to describe poetry. Literature is clearly literate *activity* that can bring everyone a fuller enjoyment of life, beyond usefulness...It is its own kind of deep play” (p. 182, emphasis in original). The term ‘strong poetry’ was first introduced by Harold Bloom (1973) to describe how “no two people can or will compose identical copies of their life stories” (Ng-a-Fook, 2016, p. xviii). Ng-a-Fook notes that Richard Rorty (1989) built on Bloom’s theory to describe the importance of telling one’s own life story rather than passively accepting a version told by someone else. Barone (1993) defines a strong poet as follows,

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A strong poet is someone who refuses to accept as useful the description of her life written by others. Instead, the strong poet is a strong storyteller, continuously revising her life story in the light of her own experience and imagination. The strong poet constantly redescribes her past interactions with the world around her, constantly reinvents her self, so that she may act in the future with greater integrity and coherence...A strong poet is not a disengaged aesthete who composes her life story in a kind of existential isolation. Instead, she is necessarily a social being and a moral agent, a responsible citizen of a shared community. (as cited in Ng-a-Fook, 2016, p. xviii)

In his acceptance speech for the Hans Christian Andersen award for Children's Book Illustration at the IBBY Congress in México City in September 2014, the Brazilian illustrator Roger Mello described the political and philosophical role of illustrating picture books to shed light on issues of societal injustice. His own childhood growing up in Brasília in the 1960's and 1970's, in a time when the military suppressed creative thought through literature, has had an impact on his desire to draw about issues such as child labour and the environment. For Mello, the act of illustrating books is a deeply philosophical and political form of expression, a mode of communication,

We grew up realizing that books might be really powerful since people could disappear because of them. We learned to read through the coded visual works of art, we turned ourselves into image readers. Reading in the silence. I kept drawing and writing whenever I could. To draw was to think with the ballpoint pen. (Mello, 2014)

Roger Mello's description of the relationship between drawing and communicating powerful ideas is an important concept that relates to the perspective of children as competent readers of images. For young readers, an engagement with challenging texts created by thought-provoking artists encourages deep thinking and aesthetic appreciation.

Contemporary children's illustrators such as Roger Mello demonstrate a respect for their audience by presenting complex ideas through drawing and writing. As noted by Maagerø and

Østbye (2012) in an analysis of the Norwegian picture book *The World Has No Corners* (*Verdan har ingen hjørner*) by Svien Nyhus (1999), children's literature offers both young readers and adults the opportunity to think and reflect on important issues. These theorists assert that such texts invite children to be 'prominent readers' and 'strong poets' through the act of reading and interpreting philosophical ideas and meaning-making,

Picture books invite children into a world of thinking and wondering about existential topics such as life and death, growing up and getting old, God, the relations between child and parents, children's relationship to animals and nature, friendship, ethical questions, etc. These picture books do not give clear answers to the many questions that are raised. The questions invite speculation about phenomena in human life, not in order to find the right answers, because there are no right answers, but to highlight such questions, to reflect and to see different perspectives. (p. 324)

By learning the power of images and words, as Mello mentions, children begin to develop critical literacy through their engagement with issues of social justice present in visual literature.

CRITICAL LITERACY AND IMAGINATION

As children enter the world of picture books, they are able to respond and share those responses with others, thus gaining an understanding of human emotions and experiences through literature. Picture books provide a space for students to imagine and explore, to experience new ideas and language. The power of literature to ignite our imagination is emphasized by Maxine Greene: "Opening ourselves as imaginative, intuitive, feeling, thinking beings, we may discover something about what it signifies to create our own meanings along with other human creatures" (1978, p. 31). Meek observes that,

Literacy is enhanced, made strong by readers and writers entering the alternative worlds of prose fiction, drama, and poetry—depends on our agreeing that the experience of all readers...can be extended by entering the alternative worlds of

prose fiction, drama and poetry. (p. 186)

Meek notes that texts such as Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* extend children's understanding of alternative perspectives.

To engage with contemporary literature, many theorists suggest that critical literacy is key to reading and discussing texts dealing with social and cultural issues (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Jewett, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2009; Stonebanks, 2010). Critical literacy involves going beyond making a personal connection with the text, in order to “read knee deep”, questioning the assumptions in the social and political texts as well as having an awareness of how one is positioned as a reader (Jewett, 2007). Jewett's study in a children's literature course examined how students in an elementary teacher education program engaged in discourses of justice, inequities, and racism through the reading of children's literature based on Rosa Parks' story in the United States. The researcher noted that there are challenges to employing critical literacy in a classroom, as it involves exploring some very difficult questions and topics. This opportunity to read critically is important for future teachers as it will enable them to develop an awareness of teaching with a social and cultural perspective in their own classrooms. Researchers have explored the use of literature circles in classrooms as a meaningful way to explore multicultural literature (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Moller, 2002). This research contributes to our understanding of reader-response and curriculum, as it suggests that through critically engaging with literary texts that address social justice, students and teachers form a supportive community. Children's understanding of literature is *mediated* through peer discussion and scaffolding provided by the teacher. As Sloan (2003) notes in *Child as Critic*, “An informed, enthusiastic teacher is there to bring children and literature together, to listen, to ask the right questions, to inspire and to nurture creative effort” (p. 208).

From a social justice perspective, critical literacy also necessitates considering the ways in which children's multilingual literacies are included and supported in the early childhood classroom. Given the increasing numbers of children in classrooms around the world who are learning English—and French, in certain contexts such as Canadian French immersion and Francophone classrooms both in Québec and in minority language contexts—there is a need to pay attention to

how children are supported in their language and literacy practices. Bridging the gap between the use of languages in the classroom, home, and community may be facilitated through parental and community involvement. Recent work by researchers Taylor et al., (2008) with young children and families in the Toronto area considers “the significance of migrant family multilingual literacies for transnational identity trajectories (or dynamic multiple belonging) and pathways to literacy” (p. 273) through the exploration of how family literacies may be linked to the literacy practices in schools.

In a study with bilingual Grade Four students reading multicultural literature, including *Felita*, a novel that explores the experiences of a Puerto Rican family who move to a new neighbourhood and experience discrimination, DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) demonstrate that peer mediation in literature circle discussions enables children to develop a critical lens as they deepen their own understandings of social issues. In this study, the Grade Four students spoke Spanish and English, and were able to provide each other with support in learning both languages as they read and discussed the literature. These experiences with the texts encouraged the students to draw on their cultural and linguistic resources to discuss with their peers. Moreover, the students helped each other to critically examine their own values, beliefs, and experiences as they read and responded to the multicultural literary texts.

Teachers play an important role in guiding their students in finding the books that will enable them to gain a deeper understanding of both themselves and others, as well encouraging children to interpret texts. Cai (2003) reminds us that educators need to move from “informing” to “empowering” children to address issues of social justice, such as racism and discrimination, through the reading of multicultural stories. It is the responsibility of the teacher to encourage students to think about these social issues so that the children will empower themselves (Cai, 2003, p. 278). According to Cai, many children’s books exist that address interracial relationships, such as *Angel Child, Dragon Child* (Surat, 1989) and *Chicken Sunday* (Polacco, 1992). Moreover, Cai encourages teachers and librarians to actively help children find and engage with picture books that deal with race, such as *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976). There is a need for educators to know their own students, as well as to have a strong sense of self-

awareness and an open mind to the possibilities that literature may present for children. A culturally responsive approach to pedagogy through literature is possible when educators “recognize children’s intelligences and cultures in the classroom through dialogues initiated from multicultural literature, while critically exploring hard issues, such as diversity, gender equity, strength and power, and considering multiple perspectives” (Soutu-Manning, 2009, p. 71).

Soutu-Manning (2009) describes how she draws on critical literacy theories for her own teacher action research, examining “literacy as an introduction to democratization, conceptualizing learners as agentive subjects rather than passive recipients of knowledge” (p. 53). Her work seeks “...to engage with local realities, mobilize students’ knowledges, practices, and experiences, subvert taken for granted ‘school’ texts, and collectively examine how power is exercised and by whom” (p. 53). Thus, by opening the spaces for democratic dialogue in her classroom, Soutu-Manning validated and affirmed the knowledge(s) and experiences that her students brought to the classroom,

As the teacher, I focused on the children and made them and their interests central in the classroom. I did not try to mold them to the pre-set curriculum. Instead, I fit the curriculum around their interests and curiosities. I identified pre-set curriculum standards in the negotiated critical literacy curriculum, bringing multicultural children’s literature to the classroom focusing on and teaching the children, not primarily the curriculum. (p. 71)

Through a critical literacy approach, the teacher-researcher, Soutu-Manning, engaged her students in considering multiple perspectives and discussing social issues. The first grade students were able to examine and problematize the issues presented in children’s books such as *Goin’ Someplace Special* (McKissack, 2001), *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001) and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995). The young children in Soutu-Manning’s (2009) classroom “developed empathy for the characters and delved into larger social issues” as they read and discussed these stories (p. 17).

Through critical literacy that is negotiated between children and teachers, we may challenge the dominant discourses of school and literacy that often exclude young children. Soutu-Manning (2009) notes that schools “are shaped by culturally specific knowledge, creating insiders

and outsiders and identifying successful children according to the alignment between home and school discourses”(p. 255). In what ways may visual and critical literacies foster children’s critical understandings of ideologies and society that contribute to building socially just communities?

COMMUNITY-BUILDING THROUGH LITERATURE

As children come together in a classroom, it is through participation in shared stories and activities that they may form friendships, building communities based on respect and trust. In order for this community to be democratic and inclusive, all children need to feel that they are valued and that they have something special to contribute. Maxine Greene (1995) encourages us to think about democracy as “...a community that is always in the making. Marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and a dialogue about others, it must remain open to newcomers, those too long thrust aside” (p. 39).

A community is a place where we learn to live *with* others through finding common understandings and ways of *being* together. Greene (1995) states, “In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying...” (p. 39). For children in a culturally diverse classroom, the story of a community is created together by learning about one another and finding “ways to make inter-subjective sense” (p. 39).

Through in-depth and close qualitative and ethnographic studies of children engaging with dialogue around stories (Souto-Manning, 2009) and producing their own stories (Dyson, 1994), researchers have illustrated the social nature of constructing meaning, and how these stories become threads that are woven together to form the fabric of community, where diverse individual and group voices are acknowledged and respected by peers and adults. Considering the classroom as a location of multiplicity, where diverse voices are brought together, I am interested in the ways in which the aesthetic experience of engaging in visual literacy practices may provide opportunities for children to imagine and participate in a community, and how this contributes to a sense of belonging. In what ways may reading stories that speak of difference and of the multiplicity of voices in the classroom allow for a more inclusive and welcoming place?

The early childhood classroom potentially becomes a dynamic space for respectful and open dialogue and interaction as the teacher engages the students in multiliteracies. In terms of language and literacy instruction and across the curriculum, this involves including counter narratives that challenge young readers to consider multiple and marginalized perspectives. Culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on the strengths of students, and teaches to those strengths (Gay, 2010, p. 31).

Visual texts, particularly those written by marginalized writers, serve to provide children with multiple perspectives. As noted by Sims Bishop (2003), the “cultural function of story” may “counter the effects of oppression and marginalization” (p. 25). In a study of multiracial books, Chaudhri and Teale (2013) remark, “Racial pride, knowledge of history, culture and languages, and group loyalty in order to increase visibility and power created an environment that made the inclusion of mixed people desirable and necessary” (p. 372). They observe that noteworthy mixed race books for children include *Stringz* (Wenberg, 2010), *Cashay* (McMullan, 2009) and *We Were Here* (de la Peña, 2009). By looking at historical and contemporary social justice issues and the rights of the children in children’s books from a critical perspective, we may gain a deeper understanding of “the historical and contextual ways in which subjectivities are created”, thus creating the possibility for a curriculum that may “create a critical, reflective sense of agency and enable students to learn how to critique inequality both within and between cultures” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 645). As such, I am interested in how deep engagements with picture books may promote human rights education by providing a concrete way to foster critical awareness among children and teachers to work towards social justice for all citizens.

This vision for human rights education has been prioritized in recent years by the United Nations with initiatives such as the Plan of Action: World Programme for Human Rights Education (UNESCO & OHCHR, 2006) that emphasizes that the integration of human rights education,

...is widely considered to be integral to every child’s right to a quality education, one that not only teaches reading, writing and arithmetic, but also strengthens the child’s capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and promotes a culture which is infused by human rights values. (p. 2-3)

LITERACY PRACTICES IN DIVERSE SOCIAL CONTEXTS

As researchers (Arizpe et al., 2014; Hope 2008; Naqvi, 2009) are noting the power of narrative and visual literature to affirm the complex identities of children, I believe that we are able to move towards a more culturally-responsive approach to pedagogy that includes multiliteracies and validates the funds of knowledge children bring to the classroom. A *funds of knowledge* framework (González, 2005; Moll, 2005) emphasizes the need for children's lived-practices and experiences to be validated through "pro-active and life affirming" approaches that acknowledge the resources they bring to the classroom (p. 43). A culturally and linguistically inclusive approach to pedagogy affirms the multiple identities of young children through participation of family members in their literacy practices (Taylor et al., 2008). The concept of validating children's knowledge(s) and life experiences is related to how children may read and respond to contemporary literature as they reflect on their own identities.

Numerous studies, including the work of researchers such as Dyson, Heath, Kress, Moll, Pahl, and Street have shown that the social worlds of the home, community, and school are traditionally quite distinct.

Dyson's (1993; 1994) ethnographic research in a K-3 urban school in the United States demonstrates that we can learn a lot about the way children form their own social world or community within the context of the official world of the classroom, and how children negotiate their identities through storytelling,

Particularly powerful stories may come about when children's stories function as a kind of crossroad: when they bring feelings, experiences, and language from the unofficial classroom worlds of peers and neighborhoods into the official classroom community and when those stories are themselves ways for children to make use of artistic tools and reflective processes valued in the official world. (Dyson, 1994, p. 157)

Dyson examined the texts written by the students in their daily writing activities, specifically looking at the *social purposes* of their texts. In Dyson's (1994) ethnographic research, she describes in detail the writings of one young boy in Grade Three named William, and the way in which he expressed his voice and identity through the texts he produced in the class. Dyson (1994) points out that

William used writing not only to express himself as “a competent kid who was a member of important social groups” but also enabled the teacher, Louise, to learn about her “children’s social lives and personal interests” (p. 161).

Gregory and Williams (2000) have explored the ‘unofficial’ literacies of children living in East London communities. By recording the literacy histories and practices of thirteen families, both Bangladeshi British and white British Londoners with young children, the study sheds light on how children participate in multiple literacy practices that are not recognized within the official paradigm of school literacy. Conversations with the young children aged five to seven revealed that they often engaged in reading outside of school. The Bangladeshi British children reported they were reading in Arabic, Bengali, and English. The social aspect of learning Bengali and Arabic in language classes is highlighted, as well as the ‘syncretic’ blending of literacies through book-sharing with siblings at home. Gregory and Williams (2000) argue that there should be a greater recognition of the out-of-school ‘unofficial’ literacy practices of children, in order to build on and extend these experiences to the classroom literacy instruction.

Adrienne Clarkson (2016) remarks that immigration patterns have resulted in greater linguistic diversity among the Canadian population,

Where the largest increases in ‘home languages’ are spoken by people from Asia, North Africa, and Latin America. Chinese as mother tongue leapt to one million in 2006 from 100,000 in 1971. The Indo-Pakistani languages were spoken by nearly a million Canadians in 2006 compared to 33,000 four decades before. (para. 5)

What does this mean for Canadian classrooms, and how may we support the diverse identities and knowledges of multilingual children?

Kenner’s (2000) research in a multilingual nursery in South London illustrates the ways that children, teachers, and parents can work together to support children’s multiliteracy practices. In her study, Kenner worked with children from various language backgrounds including Arabic, Spanish, Yorubu, Thai, Tigrinya, Gujarati, Cantonese, and Filipini, as well as their teacher and parents. When the children were encouraged to bring home-texts to the nursery classroom and create new texts,

they participated in re-interpreting and extending their multilingual literacy practices.

Including texts that represent the diversity and complexity of Canada's histories is essential to building inclusive classroom communities. Kyo Maclear, Canadian author and novelist of mixed heritage (Japanese and British), notes in an interview with the Canadian literary magazine *Quill & Quire* that her visits in schools spark a reaction from children in Canadian classrooms: "Often, I'll go to a classroom and almost the entire class is either visible minority or first-generation Canadian, second-language English," she says. "They'll be kind of surprised when I walk in that I'm the author...if these kids don't think I really fit the profile of an author, then what does that say about their thoughts about themselves?" (Jeevandam, 2013, p. 22). She inspires children to consider the expanded possibilities for *who* may become an author and whose stories are told... "It's a process of them beginning to imagine themselves as writers, as producers of culture," she notes in the interview (Jeevandam, 2013, p. 22). These words, from a children's author, point to the power of a story—and of an author—to provide children with ways of thinking, seeing, and viewing alternative perspectives and to listen to the voices of the characters. A story may become a catalyst for dialogue about important issues central to children's lives. Furthermore, Maclear's words are filled with a respect for the rights of children as she hopes they will consider themselves as 'writers and producers of culture'.

When considering the use of diverse children's literature in classrooms, it is necessary to consider how teacher education programs prepare educators for addressing themes and issues raised in the literature, such as bullying, racism, and discrimination. According to Nieto (2004), anti-racist education is central within a contemporary curriculum of diversity, and yet, unfortunately, racism is a topic that is rarely discussed in schools. Moreover, current waves of migration have resulted in a necessity to provide children with a chance to hear the multiple narratives and voices of authors who write of young people's experiences of negotiating a sense of identity in times of change.

Schwartz (1995) describes the shift from modernism to critical postmodernism as the embracing of a broader definition of multiculturalism, as indicated in the statement by the Council on Interracial Books for Children (1980) that includes "different ages, social classes, genders,

physical abilities, and also addressed issues of neo-colonialism, culture, institutional racism, and sexism, and an understanding of the complexities of power” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 642). As Short and Fox (2003) point out, the goals of multicultural education “emphasize the sociopolitical nature of education through challenging and rejecting racism and discrimination and affirming pluralism, particularly for individuals and groups considered outside of the mainstream of society” (p. 7). According to Nieto (2004), anti-racist education is central to education in multicultural contexts, and yet, unfortunately, racism is a topic that is rarely discussed in schools. Through dialogue and responses to literature raising issues of human rights, critical issues such as racism and other forms of discrimination and exclusion may be addressed. Hope (2008) shows us how literature is one way of addressing racism, as she describes her work with young children in the UK reading stories of the refugee experience.

By recognizing the multiple literacies of young learners, drawing on NLS, researchers and educators challenge traditional and outmoded notions of learning. This recognition necessarily involves building on the cultural and linguistic resources that children bring to the classroom. According to Street (2005), ‘attempts to bridge and blur the traditional boundaries of language, literacy and learning, in and out of school are not, then, simply accounts of variation but also, in all cases accounts of power’ (p. 11). It is important to note that Street (2005) also calls for researchers to think critically and reflexively about issues of power in the relationships and process of research itself within educational contexts. I argue that engaging children with contemporary visual literature and listening to their responses creates spaces for children to become ‘strong poets’ as they compose the narratives of their own lives.

CONCLUSION

Artists and literacy researchers alike acknowledge that picture books are sophisticated and complex works of art that provide enriching experiences for children. Interpreting images and words in picture books is a social practice (Serefani, 2014), and is also an aesthetic experience that ignites the imagination. It is these creative spaces that I am interested in exploring, those made possible through children's encounters with picture books that enlighten and challenge their imagination to consider possibilities for change. Children have a right to read and respond to visual texts that challenge their thinking and contribute to their imagination and "well-being" (United Nations, 1989).

I have reviewed theories and perspectives in literacy practices in relation to children's literature in the early childhood classroom. I have examined current perspectives and understandings of children's engagements with literature as well as the role of stories in the primary classroom. Stories contribute to the fabric of communities, both in the classroom and beyond. Research in children's responses to visual texts has demonstrated that picture books engage young children while also contributing to "their cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual development" (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 86). In contemporary Canadian classrooms there is tremendous potential for stories to spark dialogue and contribute to a sense of community among young children.

The use of visual literature is a powerful way of enabling young children to imagine, wonder, question, hope, and envision, for it is through story and encounters with images that young readers-viewers may come to have a deeper understanding of belonging, interconnectedness and relationships in order to contribute to transformation and social change. In Chapter Three, I explore methodologies for researching with children and teachers in primary classrooms.

METHODOLOGIES FOR LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S VOICES AND THEIR ONE HUNDRED LANGUAGES

<i>Invece il cento c'è</i>	<i>The child</i>
<i>Il bambino</i>	<i>is made of one hundred.</i>
<i>e fatto di cento.</i>	<i>The child has</i>
<i>Il bambino</i>	<i>a hundred languages</i>
<i>ha cento</i>	<i>a hundred hands</i>
<i>lingue</i>	<i>a hundred thoughts</i>
<i>cento mani</i>	<i>a hundred ways of thinking</i>
<i>cento pensieri</i>	<i>of playing, of speaking.</i>
<i>cento modi di pensare</i>	<i>A hundred always a hundred</i>
<i>di giocare e di parlare</i>	<i>ways of listening</i>
<i>cento sempre</i>	<i>of marveling, of loving</i>
<i>cento modi di ascoltare</i>	<i>a hundred joys</i>
<i>di stupire di amare</i>	<i>for singing and understanding</i>
<i>cento allegrie</i>	<i>to discover</i>
<i>per cantare a capire</i>	<i>a hundred worlds</i>
<i>cento mondi da scoprire</i>	<i>to invent</i>
<i>cento mondi da inventare</i>	<i>a hundred worlds</i>
<i>cento mondi da sognare</i>	<i>to dream.</i>

Loris Malaguzzi

Translated from the Italian by Lella Gandini, 1998

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I describe the conceptual theories that have informed my methodological framework of listening to and researching *with* children. The poem *Invenire il cento c'è* by Reggio Emilia founder Loris Malaguzzi expresses the ideas that children have many ways of communicating, wondering, and imagining, and these are not often valued in traditional methods of pedagogy. This poem serves as an inspiration and starting point for methodology. We must ask ourselves how education, and research to improve education, can foster and respect children's one hundred languages. My interest in listening to children has been informed by childhood studies researchers (Corsaro, 2003; Dyson, 2000; Falchi, Axelrod, & Genishi, 2014; Hickman, 1983; Kendrick, 2016; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Edwards et al., 1998; Maguire, 1999) who have worked extensively with young children in educational settings around the world. I am also drawing on visual methodologies (Kendrick, 2016; Mitchell, 2011) in working with children.

In the **first section**, I discuss concepts of listening and seeing in relation to working with children. The **second section** explores qualitative research in educational settings with children. In **section three**, I consider theories of visual methodologies in researching children's literacy practices. Section four discusses researcher reflexivity and ethics.

LISTENING: A WAY OF SEEING AND LOOKING

My research focus on listening to children's responses to literature involved working closely with children and teachers to gain insight into their perspectives and experiences in the classroom. As such, I have adopted the stance that I am constantly learning alongside the children and teachers. Malaguzzi, in an interview on Reggio Emilia, remarks,

...not knowing is the condition that makes us continue to search...we are in the same situation as the children. We can be sure that the children are ready to help us. They can help by offering us ideas, suggestions, problems, questions, clues, and paths to follow; and the more they trust us and see us as a resource, the more they give us

help” (as cited in Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 89)

In a movement towards embracing the multiple ways that children express themselves, educational researchers have developed methodological and philosophical approaches to listening to children (Bath, 2013; Clark & Moss, 2001; Dyson, 2001; Meek, 1982; Paley, 1986; Rinaldi, 2006). The Reggio Emilia notion of a “pedagogy of listening” is based on relationships between the children and educators. Edwards et al. (1998) observe the way in which respectful relationships are fostered through an approach to learning that positions both adults and children as inquirers and engaged thinkers.

Vecchi (2004), who works with young children using the Reggio Emilia approach in Italy, describes the need, more than ever, for young children to have encounters with the arts and to communicate through their languages. Vecchi remarks, “an encounter between young people and poetic languages is increasingly necessary not only for its own sake but also because it can prepare a fertile ground where other languages can take root” (p. 142). In other words, the more opportunities that children have to encounter and experience creative processes and to communicate in different ways, the more their interest and curiosity will also grow and flourish. As an educator and a researcher, I am interested in how we may provide children with meaningful opportunities to have such encounters with the arts and with one another in classrooms. I will explore these ideas in this chapter that describes the conceptual framework for my methodology.

In his preface to the *One Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Education* (Edwards et al., 1998), psychologist Howard Gardner points out that there is much for educators and researchers to learn from a Reggio Emilia in working with young children. In particular, Gardner observes that the teachers in the preschool classrooms in Italy were attentive to the children, and that this made all of the difference in the quality of interactions and work,

In Reggio, the teachers know how to listen to children, how to allow them to take initiative, and yet how to guide them in productive ways. There is no fetish made about achieving adult standards, and yet the dedication exemplified by the community ensures that work of quality will result. The effect comes about because of the infinite care

taken with respect to every aspect of existence whether it be the decision to constitute groups of two as compared with three children, the choice of brush or colour or the receptivity to surprises and to surprise. (Gardner, 1998, p. xvii)

Vecchi (2004) writes about a Reggio Emilia project with young children in *Children, art, artists: The expressive languages of children, the artistic language of Alberto Barri*. The project in Italy involved young children encountering the art and artist through an in-depth project that engaged all of the senses. There is much that we can learn from the work of Reggio Emilia educators in relation to the many ways that children and teachers engage in meaningful ways with one another through the use of one hundred languages.

The research methods for this classroom-based research study are qualitative, drawing on ethnographic methods and multimodal forms of data. Drawing on work in image-based and visual literacy research with children (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Mitchell, 2011) and the philosophy of listening to the ‘one hundred languages’ of children as described by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood (Edwards et al., 1998), I focus on the multiple ways that children communicate and co-construct meaning through literary experiences. The research context, data gathering methods, and picture books are described in Chapter Four. The stories that the teachers and children and I read together in this study provided a pretext to establishing and building meaningful relationships through deep and sustained engagement with the literature and sharing responses. In developing the qualitative methodology for this study with children and teachers, I considered ways that we could make the learning of children visible, by respecting their right to be heard. This methodology included an approach that validated the many ways that children express their thoughts and ideas, and how they negotiate relationships with others through engaged creative work. My interpretations of the data will be described in Chapters Five to Seven. Here I will focus on the conceptual framework for my methodology.

Drawing on the work of childhood theorists and educators, I argue that an approach to researching with children by listening to their hundred languages is a way to encompass the diverse meaning-making activities of young children and teachers reading contemporary literature. As noted

by Kendrick and McKay (2004), “there is an urgent need for including in school curricula multimodal representations which allow for the expression of a much fuller range of human emotion and experience, and which acknowledge the limits of language” (p. 111).

The research methodology for this study is grounded in theories of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin et al. 2006; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003), ethnographic research with children (Amanti, 2005; Corsaro, 2011; Falchi et al., 2014; James, 2001; Moll, 2005) research on children’s drawings and meaning-making (Anning & Ring, 2004; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Kress, 1997; Mavers, 2011; Mitchell, 2011), children’s responses to literature (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Hickman, 1979; Mackay, 2003; Pantaleo, 2015; Sipe, 2008; Souto-Manning, 2009) and the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education (Edwards et al., 1998; Vecchi, 2004).

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) describe the complexities of qualitative research, ...fundamentally interpretive and emergent, characterized by a stance of openness, curiosity and respect. On the practical side, qualitative research is labour-intensive, time-consuming, frustrating, and challenging. There are no formulaic rules to follow, only guiding principles gained from direct experience including reading the literature, studying with others, and the actual doing. It is also exhilarating and deeply moving and it can change the researcher’s worldview. (p. 12-13)

These words reflect the emergent nature of qualitative research, as well as the necessity of learning by studying theories and the experience of the *actual doing*. As a qualitative researcher with an interest in children’s engagements with contemporary children’s literature, I have approached this work through a stance of “openness, curiosity and respect” (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003, p. 12). Pole and Morrison (2003) maintain that “reading, writing and curiosity are essential aspects” of doing ethnography (p. 17). This idea relates also to what Malaguzzi (1998) describes in Reggio Emilia as the stance of not knowing that is so important to working with children. Child Studies scholar Berry Mayall (2002) writes,

I regard children as a minority social group, whose wrongs need righting...and I do think that a clear theoretically informed understanding of the social status of childhood in relation to adulthood is an essential key to working towards those wrongs. (p. 9)

Mayall (2000) emphasizes the importance of children's "right to be heard and their views taken into account...It is through working towards better understanding of the social conditions of childhood that we can provide a firm basis for working towards implementation of their rights" (p. 243).

These notions are key to the methodological conceptual framework of listening to children's voices.

RESPECTING CHILDREN

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood pedagogy is based on the idea of children as citizens with rights. Being conscious of the rights of the child and the way in which we, as educators and researchers, view children and childhood is essential in order to engage in respectful relationships and meaningful dialogue with children (Ho Chan, 2010). Furthermore, a participatory perspective to education that respects the rights of the child focuses on children as citizens in the present, not simply as future citizens (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007; Quennerstedt, 2011). Citing the early work in ethnography with children that focused on their games and social interactions in play, James (2007) maintains that "ethnographic approaches are central for the new paradigm for the study of childhood" as this is an approach which employs "children's own accounts centrally within the analysis" (p. 250; see also James & Prout, 1997). In the next section, I will explore the concept of listening as a way of researching with children.

ETHICS OF LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S VOICES

Scholarly work in Childhood Studies (Bath, 2013; Clark & Moss, 2001; Paley, 1997; Rinaldi, 2006) and visual research (Thomson, 2008) has contributed to our understanding of the importance of listening to children. Research on children's drawings and meaning-making (Anning & Ring, 2004; Falchi et al., 2014; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Mavers, 2011) has offered diverse perspectives on the ways that children express their voices through multiliteracies (Kress,

1997; Stein, 2007; The New London Group, 1996). As described in Chapter Two, there have also been recent studies on children's visual and verbal responses to picture books (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Sipe, 2008) including feminist (Davies, 2003) and multicultural (Souto-Manning, 2009) stories, as well as teachers' engagements with literature for social justice (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013; Strong-Wilson, 2008).

Child psychologist Susan Engel (1994) calls on adults to be attentive listeners of young children. She writes that when,

A child describes an experience that he or someone else had, he is adding to his sense of who he is and conveying that sense to others... It is through telling stories that children develop a personal voice, a way of communicating their unique experience and view of the world. (p. 2)

Educators and researchers working with young children know that to establish respectful relationships with children is to listen to them closely and to be genuinely open to their thoughts and ideas, acknowledging their life experiences. By listening, researchers and educators acknowledge the importance of what children have to say. Susan Engel (1994) remarks,

Children are often deeply social in the way that they approach the task of constructing stories. They need responsive, engaged, attuned listeners and collaborators in order to go on trying to express and create themselves through their stories. (p. 218)

Childhood educators and researchers have demonstrated that listening to children is a way of respecting and valuing their points of view (Clark & Moss, 2011; Davies, 2014; Engel, 1994; Maguire, 2005; Paley, 2007; Crump & Phipps, 2013). Working within a social-constructivist framework, I view children as active participants in co-constructing their understandings of the world through social interactions with peers and adults (Mayall, 2002). As such, this study draws from theories of childhood studies developed by researchers who advocate for research that listens and responds to children's views and experiences (Waller, 2006). Falchi et al. (2014) maintain that a multimodal approach is compatible with a sociocultural perspective as it is a way to open spaces for

children to express themselves and to explore their own interests through multimodal literacy practices.

In researching with children, listening is a way to “make visible, within the everyday, the extraordinary capacities children have, and the emergent, the creative and the intra-active encounters they engage in as they do the ongoing work of bringing themselves and their community into being” (Davies, 2014, p. 15). Having respect for children and caring about issues that are important to them is central to researching with and teaching children. Katz (1998) notes,

The ability of young children to sense what the important adults in their lives really care about is likely to be universal. Thus all teachers might ask: what do most of my pupils really believe I take seriously and care deeply about. (p. 38)

I would argue that this is also an important part of researching with children, as the children will certainly sense what the researcher cares about and how they respect the children they are working with. For instance, taking the time to listen carefully, and to engage in creative projects that children enjoy requires time and the willingness to be open to children’s ideas. Researching *with* children requires self-reflexivity, an awareness of ones’ own values and interests, as well as being open to the ideas and perspectives of children. Knowing oneself is essential in order to respect and work with others, especially in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. An awareness of self is also an important part of teaching, as noted by Palmer (2007), who writes,

My ability to connect with students, and to connect them with the subject depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning. (p. 11)

Corsaro and Molinari (2008) explore methodological issues in research with young children. In describing the vignettes of their study in an Italian preschool, they demonstrate the significance of the nature of the relationship between the researcher and children in the preschool. Clearly, establishing a relationship with children and entering their world takes time, trust, and willingness on the part of the researcher to understand their complex social worlds. Brearley and Hamm (2009) note that,

Taking the time to invest in relationships lies at the heart of deep listening. The building of community is predicated on the development of mutual trust. The building of trust is slow work and needs to be attended to in an on-going way over a sustained period...Deep listening is underpinned by the concepts of community and reciprocity. Deep listening changes people. (p. 44)

Drawing on her work in Reggio Emilia-inspired pre-schools in Sweden, Davies (2014) describes the ways in which adults can learn from children to engage in reciprocal listening. For instance, in Reggio Emilia philosophy, the concept of “one hundred languages” is “a declaration of the equal dignity and importance of all languages, not only writing, reading, and counting...for the construction of knowledge” (Rinaldi, 2006 cited in Davies, 2014, p. 12).

Bath (2013) suggests, “conceptualisations of listening are best understood if they are embedded within an ethics of care which brings adults and children together in democratic practices” (p. 361). By applying the notions developed by the alternative models of both the Mosaic approach and Reggio Emilia, and making connections to the ethics of care (Sevenhuijsen, 1998), Bath (2013) proposes that early childhood settings have the potential to become more democratic spaces that involve both adults and children when we “commit to listening as an ethic of care” (p. 369).

RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS *WITH* CHILDREN

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH USING ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

In this section, I will describe some of the ways that ethnographic methods have informed this qualitative study. Ethnographic methods involve participating “in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) provide a description of “doing” ethnographic research based on the following conventions,

- The research involves fieldwork in a natural rather than in an experimental setting
- Data is gathered through multiple sources, “participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones”
- Categories for data are generated through the process of data analysis
- A focus on a single setting “facilitate(s) in-depth study”
- Data analysis “involves interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced...are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories...” (p. 3)

McCarty (2011), citing Wolcott (2008), observes that ethnographic research is a “‘way of seeing’ that is situated, and a ‘way of looking’ that is grounded in long term in-depth, personal accounts” (p. 3). Working within an educational context, ethnographic methods enable us to understand the complexities of children’s literacy practices, as we ask ourselves the question, *‘What is going on here?’* (Hornberger, 2016; see also Geertz, 1988; McCarty, 2011; Wolcott, 1990). Schwandt (2007) notes that some qualitative inquirers,

Argue that the concept of the field (events, actions, contexts) as locatable in time and place ought to be replaced by the idea of a field as a multiplicity of images and reproduction characteristic of a *cinematic society*. In such a society life is theatre and the field is a staged production. (p. 114, emphasis in original).

Indeed, researching with children and teachers in a school setting requires an awareness of multiple images.

Interdisciplinary researchers who have worked with children, teachers, and communities, such as Shirley Brice Heath, provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of the context in which they are working. Acknowledging that the participants she writes about in her ethnographic work are “real people whose lives go on” beyond the study, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) notes that “the reader should move very close to a living understanding of the ways of behaving, feeling, believing, and valuing of the children, their community members, and their townspeople teachers” (p. 13).

According to educational sociologists Pole and Morrison (2003), ethnography “seeks to make sense of social settings and social behaviors from the inside, privileging the perspectives of people involved in the situation that is the focus of the investigation” (p. xiii). In the next section, I will focus on qualitative and ethnographic studies with children.

RELATIONSHIPS, STORIES, AND KNOWLEDGES

Qualitative research in educational settings is centred on human relationships. Drawing on socio-cultural (Vygotskian) theories, I acknowledge that identities and perspectives are fluid and dynamic, constantly shifting and evolving. Studies by researchers who have worked in the classroom with teachers, participating actively in the life of the school, have drawn attention to the importance of stories in the lives of teachers and children. Like many qualitative researchers of childhood and children, I view children as *competent social actors* who can inform research by expressing their own perspectives (Christensen & James, 2000, 2008; James, 2001; Maguire, 2009). James (2007) notes that ethnography is “appreciated for the insight which it can yield into the social aspects of children’s development in *particular cultural contexts*” (p. 249, emphasis added). In other words, qualitative research, with ethnographic methods, is one way of exploring the unique experiences of a particular community and how children experience daily life through interactions. The detailed work of childhood researchers such as Dyson, Heath, Hornberger, Maguire, Malaguzzi, and Moll have transformed the way we understand children’s language and literacy experiences, as well as providing the possibilities for making changes within classroom practices.

Literacy research in education has contributed to our understandings of language and communication in the classroom (Green & Bloome, 1997) and raises issues regarding how to meaningfully engage children intellectually (Katz, 1998). Greene and Bloome (1997) highlight that such research in education often explores the social location of knowledge and the socially constructed nature of learning by asking “what counts as knowledge and learning in classrooms to students and teachers?” (p. 191). In her observations of the Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy, Katz (1998) suggests that North American education could benefit greatly from taking the time to engage

in such an approach. She writes that “we overestimate children academically and underestimate them intellectually, we miss moments when our attention could convey to children that their ideas are important” (p. 38).

In collaborative research with classroom teachers, the personal knowledge that teachers bring is privileged (Clandinin et al., 2006; Goldstein, 1998). Clandinin et al. (2006) write about the professional knowledge landscape of teachers to describe the way that teachers live their lives both in and outside of schools. Considering the professional knowledge landscape of teachers enables us to think about “space, place, and time...it has a sense of expansiveness and possibility of being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships” (p. 6).

Furthermore, the work by Heath (1983) and Moll (2005) provides in-depth explorations of the ways in which teachers bridge the gap between the school and home contexts by bringing children’s knowledges, resources, and strengths into the curriculum. This movement towards building relationships is an important shift from the traditional perspectives in education, such as the transmission model of teaching or the deficit approach where students were viewed as being deficient in their academic performance or lacking the skills required for school.

Cathy Amanti, a teacher-researcher involved in the Funds of Knowledge research led by Luis Moll, focused on ethnography to “challenge the status quo by asserting that local knowledge has a legitimate place in our educational institutions for both our students and our pedagogical knowledge as teachers” (2005, p. 132). In the Funds of Knowledge project, the teachers interviewed families in their homes to learn about their “extensive knowledges and practices” that could be integrated into the classroom curriculum. For example, when Amanti learned that many of the children in her classroom had extensive knowledge of horses, she developed a learning module to involve her students in inquiry-based research projects related to the topic of horses. Through the ethnographic approach, Amanti developed “deeper relationships” with her students and their families, as she notes “all of us became more invested in and committed to the educational process” (p. 140).

Hickman’s (1979) ethnographic study explored children’s responses to literature in three multilevel K-5 classrooms. Hickman’s ethnographic methods included participant observation,

fieldnotes, audio-recorded conversations, and photographs in the natural setting of the classrooms over a period of four months. An important aspect of Hickman's research on children's responses to literature was that the ethnography enabled her to cover "a range of events and situations" to reveal children's responses to literature, including "informal talk among children and with interested adults, the book-choosing times, and the work periods all provided new perspectives in terms of response and where and when and how it is expressed" (1980, p. 529).

Falchi et al. (2014) note that there is a prevalent discourse, particularly in North American classrooms, in which the expectations of the curriculum place an emphasis on written language over visual or other multimodal forms of literacy,

While students' drawings show that visual and spatial modes can be included in the teacher's model, they are not typically valued, discussed or privileged. Children are not able to spend too much time on them, and they are not what really "counts" as literate practices. (p. 17)

The authors are critical about the authoritative discourse of assessment, which categorizes "some students as good and others as deficient" (p. 19). Furthermore, the authors emphasize a need to focus on the diverse language and literacy practices of children and the ways in which children and teachers can pay attention to meaning-making by affording "time and space to diverse practices, competencies, and ways of being" (p. 19).

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Eder and Fingerson (2002) point out the value of participant observation with children, as there "are aspects of children's cultures that are difficult to put into words, and these aspects need to be captured through direct observation" (p. 189). Furthermore, Eder and Fingerson (2002) draw on the work of childhood play researcher Bronwyn Davies who writes "learning to interact with them (the children) on their own terms was of central importance" (p. 189). Meanwhile, Heath and Street (2008) maintain that,

...the ethnographer is the ultimate instrument of fieldwork. Necessary qualities of the best ethnographers (and logically linked to what it takes to be a participant observer) include visual acuity, keen listening skills, tolerance for detail, and capacity to integrate innumerable parts into shifting wholes. (p. 57)

Schwandt (2007) points out that observation “as a method of generating data about human experience is characterized by...attention to detail” and “...social action is regarded as processual and dynamic, not a set of discrete events” (p. 211). I will discuss further regarding my roles in the study through participant observation in Chapter Four.

Researching with children involves *being* with children, as “many features of their interactions or cultures are produced and shared in the present and cannot easily be obtained by way of reflective interviews or surveys” (Corsaro, 2003, p. 53). To observe the interactions and engagements of children in the classroom requires paying attention to the multiple ways that they express themselves. The methods I have used to gather data, interpret, and represent the data in this study highlight the value of visual methodologies in literacies research, particularly with young children.

VISUAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES WITH CHILDREN

Drawing on Stein (2000), Kendrick (2016) emphasizes how the semiotic turn in literacy studies “requires researchers to rethink traditional research methodologies... in new, creative, and multimodal ways” (p. 14). Visual methodologies theorist Gillian Rose (2012) provides researchers with ways of thinking about the production, communication, and interpretation of visual images and how these are “embedded in the social world” (p. xviii). Rose (2012) emphasizes that “the semiotic potential of signifiers, actions and objects is utilized when we *produce meanings*—when we create something as some sort of attempt to *communicate something*—and also when we receive meanings—when we *interpret the meaning-making of others*” (p. 138, emphasis added; see also Kress, 2010). Rose (2012) notes that the increasing interest in using visual images in research is due to an influence of the cultural turn, which emerged from cultural studies in the 1980s, marking the movement of social scientists to explore “social processes, social identities and social change and

conflict” (p. 1-2). An important aspect of the study of culture is that “it depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways” (Hall, 1997, cited in Rose, 2012, p. 2).

In *Doing Visual Research*, Claudia Mitchell (2011) notes that visual work with children, particularly drawings, “can be a very effective and engaging approach to gaining the perspectives of communities, particularly communities of young people” (p. 125; see also Burke & Prosser, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 2007). Kendrick and McKay (2004) observe that image based research “provide(s) researchers with a different sequence of data and an alternative means of perceiving it” (p. 113). In their research with young children ages five to six years old, the researchers engaged children in a classroom discussion of literacy in the home and school and invited children to draw pictures of their own literacy knowledge experiences. Learning to see, and hear, different perspectives is a critical aspect of becoming aware of the nuances of life, as Eisner (2008) articulates in the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*,

By learning how to read the images the arts make possible, awareness of those nuances is made possible. The examination or perception of a painting is as much a kind of reading as a text might be. One needs to learn how to see as well as learn how to read in the customary sense. Thus, in addressing what is subtle but significant, the arts develop dispositions and habits of mind that reveal to the individual a world he or she may not have noticed but that is there to be seen if only one knew how to look. (p. 11)

Literacy researcher Maureen Kendrick (2016) suggests that “ethnographic researchers need to recognize that because meaning-making and the encoding of experience takes place in all modes, data collection needs to include a wider range of modes” (p. 4). Such an approach can “bring knowing to the surface of consciousness, to help (participants) transform what they know, sense, hear, feel, and believe into a paragraph of writing, a lively dialogue, a scrapbook of images” (Stein, 2000, cited in Kendrick, 2016, p. 14). Working extensively in the field of literacy across diverse contexts and geographic locations, Kendrick describes how communicating through visual methods

such as drawing allows for “the expression of a much fuller range of human emotion than spoken or written communication alone” (p. 15; see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The emerging field of visual methodologies within literacy research draws on New Literacy Studies (NLS) and is informed by fields of work including linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and ethnography of communication (Kendrick, 2016; see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

As discussed in Chapter Two, contemporary visual literature is thought-provoking and therefore prompts creative responses among young readers. The process of engaging together also can foster relationships and understanding between children and teachers. This idea is related to the notion presented in Reggio Emilia practice that,

To a large extent the content of teacher-child relationships is focused on the work itself, rather than mainly on routines or the children’s performance of academic tasks. Adults’ and children’s minds meet on matters of interest to both of them.
(Katz, 1998, p. 36)

Kendrick (2016) draws on the work of Stein (2000), who writes,

Different occasions, contexts, and concepts which constitute people’s relations to and engagements with literacy, research in the NLS, often ethnographic in style, provides ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1983) of the complex, changing uses of multiple literacies embedded in particular domains or settings. (p. 16)

Mitchell, Theron, Smith, & Stuart (2011) note that many researchers working with children such as Goodman (1989) and Dyson (2000), have found that while observing children drawing or creating, there is “‘rich action’ going on during the drawing process... to be studied and analyzed” (p. 32). By observing children’s engagements with picture books in the classroom, my study draws on work that acknowledges multiple modes of communication, particularly visual, thus revealing nuances of “the human experience” (Kendrick & McKay, 2004) such as empathy, joy, and other complex feelings. Kendrick (2016) describes her collaborative literacy research as “a complex interplay between research/pedagogical questions, theoretical frameworks and methods of interpreting visual images” (p. 15). Visual research enables us to explore thoughts, ideas, and

feelings through alternative forms such as images (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; see also Kress, 1997; Stein, 2000; The New London Group, 1996).

RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICS

There are challenges to researching with children, as noted by Thorne in her work on children's play (1993), given that adults are positioned as authority figures in schools, and so researchers need to work in ways to "lessen the social distance" between adults and children. And yet, as Thorne describes in her work on gender and play with young children, being an adult researcher in an elementary school is complex and paradoxical. She writes,

I like to think of myself as having hung out in classrooms, lunchrooms, playgrounds, relating to kids in a friendly and sometimes helpful fashion, and treating them, in my analysis and writing, with respect...several kids asked me if I was a spy, and, in a way, I was, especially when I went in search of the activities and meanings they created when not in the company of adults. (p. 27)

It was critical for me to consider my own "position" in the study (Saven-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 76). I will discuss more about my own role in relation to positionality in Chapter Four. Saven-Baden and Howell Major (2013) note that reflexivity "helps the researcher to consider that it is not possible to remain outside the subject or process of the research and look in; rather, the research is both integral and integrated in the process" (p. 76).

In *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, Wall (2010) provides an in-depth exploration of the ethical dimensions of considering children and childhood. His analysis has important implications for research and pedagogy, as he describes a philosophy based on ethics. Wall writes that listening to children and being open to their thoughts and ideas gives us the possibility for growth and forming new understandings. Therefore, when working with young children, researchers and educators may reflect on the responsibility they have to listen and be fully present to the narratives of young children, which involves an openness on the part of the adult to being disrupted.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have detailed the conceptual framework of researching *with* young children and listening to children. In particular, I have argued for methods that provide for broader understandings of the diverse ways in which children communicate and express their worlds through their “hundred languages” (Edwards et al., 1998) in images and words. Listening, relationships, and community are central aspects of doing research with children, and these notions have deeply informed my own research study. In the next chapter, I describe the methods of being in the field and data-gathering in this classroom-based study.

4

BEING IN THE FIELD: LIVING IN THE MIDST OF STORIES

Surprises can be quite lovely at times--quite useful.' It seems to us that this excitement of discovery should be one of the hallmarks of qualitative research, and it is much more likely to happen when we have left ourselves open to the unexpected.

Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 238

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides the context of the fieldwork and data gathering methods:

- In the **first section**, I describe my entry into the research site.
- The **second section** describes the school community as well as the participating teachers and children.
- In the **third section**, I describe my research journey in collaborating with the teachers on the literacy project and the data gathering methods in the classrooms.
- In the **fourth section**, I discuss positionality and situate myself within the fieldwork.
- **Section five** describes how I worked with the qualitative data.

ENTRY AT THE RESEARCH SITE

It was a snowy day in late February when I first drove to Garden Meadows School² for a meeting with the principal, Madame Émond. When I stepped inside the school, I sensed a vibrant learning community that was full of life. Embracing the sights and sounds of the school, I noticed a display of castles and knights created by children exhibited in the front lobby. A large banner decorated by children was hanging up in the hallway to celebrate Black History Month. I could hear both English and French spoken in the school corridor.

I signed in at the office where the secretary greeted me warmly and asked me to wait for my meeting with the principal. Madame Émond was speaking with two children at a round table in the open area of the office. As I was sitting right beside the table, I couldn't help but overhear the conversation and notice the caring interaction between the principal and the students. I gathered that they were sorting out a behavioral issue that had occurred that morning in the French classroom. As I was sitting beside the table, I noticed how closely the principal listened to the children and offered guidance, encouraging them to reflect on positive aspects of their lives and what they were most grateful for. The discussion highlighted an emphasis in the school on encouraging children to be agents in their own lives and to make positive decisions that would contribute to their learning and growth. It quickly became apparent that this was truly a place where children were supported and respected by the dedicated and strong leadership of the administration.

While sitting in the office, I listened to the conversations and laughter floating through the hallways as children were walking between the gym and their classrooms. While I waited, a family entered the office to register their son for school. They also received a warm welcome from the secretary, who kindly asked the young boy if he was excited to start kindergarten. Although he was too shy to reply verbally, and clung tightly to his parents' hands, they answered for their son saying that he was 'very excited'. After completing the school's paperwork, the family asked if they could look around the school. The principal herself offered to give them a tour, and asked if I

² Pseudonyms are used for the school name as well as the school principal, the participating teachers, and children in accordance with research ethics.

would wait. Of course, I didn't mind waiting; the social interactions taking place between school staff, students, and family within this short time provided me with a glimpse into the life of the school and confirmed my interest in collaborating with this particular community for my doctoral research. When a French teacher who popped into the office asked me if I was there as a substitute teacher, I explained that I was proposing a research project with McGill University. She looked surprised and intrigued. The principal returned to meet with me, and I could see that she was having a particularly busy morning. Nevertheless, she laughed and said that she was so busy that she shouldn't ever schedule meetings on weekdays, saying, "The only time I am free is 2:00 a.m. on a Tuesday." Then, she invited me into her office to discuss my research proposal. She said, "Tell me about your project." Madame Émond appeared interested in the project, noting its relevance for the multicultural context of the school. We looked at a few of the picture books as examples that I could provide for the school. I said I was flexible in the way that the collaboration would work with the classroom teacher(s), and mentioned that the project could take place in either French or English, or bilingually, according to the interests of the teachers. We discussed how the research project would support the Peaceful Schools International initiative of the school. And just like that, the school became a home for my project.

GARDEN MEADOWS SCHOOL CONTEXT

CHOICE OF FIELD SITE

Upon receiving ethical approval from McGill in October 2013, I applied to do my research with a public English-speaking school board in the Montréal area. I was looking for a public elementary school in the Montréal area with a culturally and linguistically diverse school population. Furthermore, I was also seeking to work with teachers who were keen to explore diverse contemporary Canadian children's literature, particularly picture books, with their students through a collaborative literacy project. I had previously established a network of teachers and principals in the Montréal area through my work as a Research Assistant on a project with English and French

teachers reading Canadian literature for Social Justice (Strong-Wilson, Yoder, & Phipps, 2014). It was through this network of educators that Garden Meadows was recommended to me.

BILINGUAL CURRICULUM IN THE QUÉBEC CONTEXT

This bilingual school, with a multicultural and multilingual student body and staff, offered a rich context for exploring contemporary Canadian children's literature. Garden Meadows Elementary is a public school, offering a French and English bilingual curriculum from kindergarten to Grade Six. Each grade level has an English and French teacher team. In Grades One and Two, both English and French teachers work with the two groups in their respective grade levels on alternating days from Monday to Thursday, with half days for each group on Friday. The French teachers in Grades One and Two concentrate primarily on French Language Arts and Fine Arts instruction, while incorporating cross-curricular content-based teaching in areas such as Science. The English teachers provide instruction in English Language Arts, Math, and Ethics and Religious Culture. Specialist teachers in the school provide instruction in Music and Physical Education, in English.

Children attending Garden Meadows School have eligibility or special authorization for instruction in an English school. Within the province of Québec, most children are required to attend Francophone schools under the policy of the Charter of the French Language or Bill 101, which was implemented in 1977. However, under this charter, there are children who are eligible for instruction in English schools if they have a Certificate of Eligibility, special authorization, or temporary authorization. According to the Charter of the French Language outlined by the Québec government (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002), children may be eligible for instruction in English if they or their siblings have received a major part of their education in English in Canada or if one of their parents attended elementary school in English in Canada. Special authorization may be issued to children with learning disabilities. Children may also receive temporary authorization to attend school in English in Québec if their parents or guardians from abroad are temporarily working or studying in Québec, or if their parents or guardians are Canadian citizens or permanent residents of another province and are temporarily living in Québec (Education Québec).

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE AT GARDEN MEADOWS

Garden Meadows school community offers an array of curricular and extra-curricular resources and programs for the children. The school community is situated in a neighbourhood in Montréal that is religiously, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. The school is part of Peaceful Schools International, a Canadian non-profit organization. According to the Peaceful Schools International website (2016), each school is encouraged “to formulate its own special blend of ingredients to create a culture of peace”, evident in Garden Meadows’ initiatives to involve the children in being part of a peaceful learning community that is respectful of cultural differences. Displays with drawings by children related to peace were up on bulletins in the hallways, reflecting the school’s vision and philosophy.

The school offered extra-curricular heritage language courses to students throughout the year, including Hebrew and Hindi classes. During my study, I often heard children often refer to the enjoyment they received in participating in Heritage Language classes at the school. French language resource support is also provided. The classrooms at Garden Meadows were inclusive, with many resources in the school for children with disabilities, as well as to support children of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, classroom assistants worked closely with students with disabilities and those who benefited from support with social behavior and academic work. There were classroom assistants in all of the groups I worked with, providing care and attention to the children. These classroom assistants were important and valued members of the learning community. The teachers also worked to include all of the children by differentiating learning activities and fostering a supportive and caring community. A breakfast program was also available for children in the school, and milk was provided for the students in the morning in class. The school has a music program for each grade level, and concerts are held throughout the year. Within the music program, a music specialist teacher worked with groups of children, and the instruction included an intercultural element such as learning about music from around the world and playing various instruments including drums. Events such as the School Variety Show held in the spring were inclusive of the diverse cultures of the school by involving children in dance and song from

various cultural backgrounds. For example, a group of children sang and danced to a song from India. Garden Meadows is a flourishing, vibrant, and energizing learning community.



Figure 2. School library.

ACCESS AND ETHICS

In mid-February, 2014, I heard back from Madame Émond with the news that two teachers were interested in participating in the research study, one teaching Grade One and the other Grade Two. She asked if I could work with two French classes (and four groups of students). I was delighted with this response. I contacted the teachers by email to arrange for our first meeting. The teachers and I discussed the letters of informed consent as well as the oral assent for the children to participate in the project. When I first introduced myself to the classes, following my oral assent included in the ethics, I explained orally about the literacy project and invited the children to ask questions. The children asked many questions from the outset of the project, showing an interest in exploring ideas together. Among the questions asked by children on my first day, a girl in Grade

One insightfully asked me about what kind of stories we would read, and another asked eagerly if we would do arts and crafts. I shared some of the activities that we would do with them, such as reading books about community and drawing pictures. The children were not familiar with the word community, so we talked about the meaning of the word as a place where people live together. We discussed the city in which we lived and how that made a community, and how within the city of Montréal there were many different cultural and heritage language communities. We also discussed the concept of a community being a place where people spend time together engaged in social activities, and this could even be in a classroom or school, as well as a place where people live together. I asked them if they knew of communities or community groups, to which the Grade One children enthusiastically called out 'Jamaica' and 'Pakistan'. Their replies showed me that the children had an awareness of their own communities and heritage, and they were eager to share. We discussed how many people from different cultures and speaking diverse languages live together in Montréal, which makes this a rich and interesting place to live.

PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

When I initially met with the two teachers, they informed me that their classrooms were very culturally diverse and many children were learning French as an additional language. The teachers mentioned that the school had a large South Asian population with a number of families from India and Pakistan, who travelled frequently, often for weeks or months of the school year, to visit relatives abroad. The teachers indicated that they were open to exploring visual methods in the literacy classroom, particularly with picture books. Both teachers were interested in literature, particularly in reading new books with their children and taking more time to read aloud in the classroom while also engaging children in meaningful ways that would connect to their lives (Fieldnotes, March 11, 2014; Literacy planning meeting, March 26, 2014). The two teachers,

Madame Mai and Madame Lili³, appeared to play an active role in the school community. The teachers were involved with school-wide cultural events such as Multicultural Day and Black History Month that fostered a sense of community in the school, and worked with colleagues on numerous committees to support student learning. Madame Mai and Madame Lili showed considerable interest in learning along with their students. They were receptive to the project as a way to engage their classes with contemporary literature. As the visits followed a consistent schedule of two mornings each week in the classrooms (from late March until the end of June), and afternoons working with smaller groups or taking part in activities, the teachers included me in the daily rhythms of their classrooms. For instance, Madame Mai would inform her children by placing an image on her calendar to indicate a special activity. The teachers and children (and myself) came to look forward to these important moments spent together engaging with literature and literacy. As the project evolved, the literacy activities became anticipated events, as Madame Mai noted in an interview (April, 2014). I will discuss in further detail the themes emerging from the interviews and observations with teachers in Chapter Six, as well as the community building that took place among the children and teachers in Chapter Seven. I will now provide a portrait of each of the teachers, Madame Mai and Madame Lili.

MADAME MAI

Madame Mai teaches the Grade One French classes at Garden Meadows. She has taught for five years in this public school board in Montréal, and is in her third year of teaching at Garden Meadows School. Madame Mai is multilingual and has a keen awareness of languages and difference; she speaks six languages fluently. Her first languages are Cantonese and Mandarin, as well as a dialect from her mother's home village in China. While growing up in Montréal, Madame Mai studied in elementary and high school in the Francophone school system, as a result of Bill 101 in Québec, where she learned French fluently. In high school, she attended an IB academic program that offered a positive experience of linguistic and cultural diversity, where she also began learning Spanish. In CEGEP and University, Mai opted to study in English programs in Montréal. Madame

³ Pseudonyms are used for all participants in the study.

Mai began her academic career studying science in college, and then changed to education as a result of having a positive experience tutoring students in French in a peer support program at college. Finding the experience of helping others to learn a language and to succeed in their academic work to be highly rewarding, Madame Mai chose to pursue studies in Education. While completing her B.Ed., she began teaching Mandarin in an international elementary school after-school program. She has since completed a Master's degree in Inclusive Education, and is currently completing her second Master's degree in Educational Leadership. She embraces a philosophy of life-long learning and trying new approaches in her teaching. Eventually, Madame Mai would like to complete her Ph.D. in Education, and she is also interested in teaching early childhood education at the college level. Madame Mai is an energetic, organized, and dedicated classroom teacher who works to create a 'home' for her students in the Grade One classroom.

MADAME LILI

Madame Lili teaches Grade Two French at Garden Meadows. At the time of this study, she was in her ninth year of teaching elementary school. She taught for one year at a Francophone school board in the greater Montréal area before beginning her position as an elementary French teacher in this bilingual program with an English speaking school board. She began teaching Grade Five and then moved to Grade Two. As a child and adolescent, Lili attended Francophone elementary and high school in the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean region of Québec, before moving to Montréal and pursuing her post-secondary studies in Preschool and Elementary education at a French university in the city. While she has been teaching French to children who are learning French as an additional language, she emphasized that her teacher education program did not have specific courses in second language acquisition or pedagogy. This is also one of the areas that she finds to be challenging in teaching diverse learners and one of her motivations for joining the project, as she mentioned to me from the beginning that literacy support for her students learning French was welcomed. Lili describes her teaching to be connected to her life philosophy, as she is flexible, adapts her teaching to the children she works with, and often improvises in her classroom,

Je suis très spontanée dans la vie. C'est moi ça. Quand j'enseigne, c'est la même chose. Puis je me nourris de ce que les enfants me donnent... Je m'adapte beaucoup aux enfants.

I am very spontaneous in life. That's me. When I am teaching, it's the same thing. Also, I am nourished by what the children give me...I adapt myself to the children.

Interview, April 16, 2014

Lili often spoke about her passion for reading and literature, and this served as a point of connection between us throughout the project. We exchanged French novels to read for pleasure, in addition to the children's books for the study. She has been an avid reader since her childhood, when she first devoured novels and she was later drawn to reading philosophy as a college student. In her approach to teaching, she values the process of learning and guiding students to be reflective as they engage in developing their thoughts and learning through interaction. Furthermore, Madame Lili describes her teaching philosophy in the following words,

*Ça prend du laisser-aller.
Puis ça prends de l'humilité.*

It takes flexibility.
And it takes humility.

Interview, April 16, 2014

As Madame Lili spoke with humility about her own teaching, she emphasized the importance of fostering a place for children to grow and learn in a supportive learning environment that values the different needs of the children. Not afraid to take risks and try new approaches, Madame Lili showed her courage to teach (Palmer, 2007) and her own reflection on teaching and learning from her students in a diverse context.

PARTICIPATING CHILDREN

Sixty-four out of sixty-eight children in the four groups from the Grades One and Two classes participated in the research study. Consent was requested for the children's participation in research aspects of the project, such as collecting artifacts of children's individual work (drawings and paintings), audio-recorded conversations during literacy activities, and focus group conversations. Many cultural backgrounds were represented in the classrooms including children from families who had emigrated from countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Philippines, Germany,

Mexico, Nigeria, China, Jamaica, Morocco, the United States, as well as children of mixed heritage. Languages spoken by the children include Arabic, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Gurati, Tagalog, German, Spanish, and Mandarin, among others. The linguistic diversity in the classrooms reflects Lamarre's (2003) observation that Montréal has the highest percentage of trilingual speakers of any city in North America, where many children learn French and English at school and speak multiple languages with their families at home (Crump & Phipps, 2013; Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006; Maguire, Beer, Attarian, Baygin, Curdt-Christiansen, & Yoshida, 2005). The multilingualism of the children in the classrooms where I worked was apparent as the children shared their multiple languages in multimodal literacy activities, such as speaking and painting. There is a great diversity of family structures within the school, as I learned through conversations with the children, teachers, and principal. Many of the children live in single-parent households. As many of the children have extended family living internationally, visiting grandparents was a common topic of discussion among the children. Some of the children had grandparents living in Montréal, who also participated in various school events such as the School Variety Show in the spring.

A diversity of religions was also represented among the children in the classrooms including Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Within the context of the literacy project, children shared about their social practices related to their religion and culture through conversation, such as the celebrations of Eid, wearing a hijab, and going to the mosque or Guruduwara, learning to read and write in Arabic, or taking part in Hebrew and Hindi classes. Dyson (2001) reminds us that "children enter school with the words and symbols indexing their prior travels on Bakhtin's voice-strewn landscape—that is, in families, churches, sidewalks, and playgrounds, neighbourhoods, radiowaves, and screens of all kinds" (p. 14). Indeed, the children who participated in this study expressed, through words and images, the multilayered landscapes of their social worlds.

MY RESEARCH JOURNEY: LIVING IN THE MIDST OF STORIES

The unfolding of the project in the classrooms took on its own life as I worked alongside the teachers and children. In this section, I will describe the roles that I had with the children and the teachers in the study. My primary role was of a participant observer, although this included everything from being collaborator, observer, co-facilitator, educator, and participant in a myriad of activities with the teachers and children (see Table 1), both in the classroom and beyond (i.e. on the playground and or on a field trip). My primary focus in being a participant observer was to gain an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the children's literacy practices and the role of the teacher in supporting the children's engagement with language and literacy through literature.

ROLE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
<i>Collaborator</i>	Collaborating with teachers in selecting children's literature and offering support in the planning of literature-based instruction through a multiliteracies approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consulting teachers on their interests and those of their students. Co-selecting picture books. Sharing and exchanging literacy resources.
<i>Observer</i>	<p>Observing the children's participation in responding to picture books in Language Arts. I also observed the classroom environment.</p> <p>Being attentive to the words and images of the children and teachers in relation to their responses and relationship to stories and literacies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observing when the teachers read stories and children participated in literacy activities, as well as during school events.
<i>Participant</i>	I participated actively in the classroom literacy projects by taking part in discussions related to literature and response with children and teachers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was part of the audience in viewing the books and taking part in the aesthetic and playful experience of interacting with children's literature.

ROLE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
<i>Co-facilitator</i>	In Language Arts, the teachers and I worked together by collaboratively facilitating the classroom activities. We encouraged the children to participate actively in expressing themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting information on the authors and illustrators. • Sharing multimedia to provoke discussion and response in addition to literary texts.
<i>Educator</i>	I also contributed by co-teaching in the Language Arts classrooms. I read aloud from stories and designed arts-based participatory literacy activities in the classroom and in the library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I read <i>J'ai le droit d'être un enfant</i> to all the groups on my first visit. • The teachers asked me occasionally to read stories and to lead the class activities.

Table 1. Multiple roles as participant observer.

From the outset of the study, I immersed myself in the world of the classroom and school. The teachers and I got to know each other as we planned and shared ideas for teaching with the picture books. The moments that we took to look closely at the books, to talk about them, and to share ideas for teaching provided an opportunity for us to “slow down” which, as noted by Strong-Wilson (2006), fosters reflection “in a profession characterized by rapid movement and change” (p. 103). When the teachers decided that they would read the same children’s books with the Grades One and Two classes, this contributed to the sharing of professional practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin et al., 2006). Each teacher brought her own unique perspectives and lived experiences, from in and out of school, enlivening the dynamics of our collaboration within the landscape of these classrooms. The teachers welcomed this opportunity to work and share ideas with one another. The enthusiasm and open attitude that the teachers held for delving into their own aesthetic experiences with children’s books, as well as the children’s engagements, propelled our literacy project into action. Furthermore, our shared interest in exploring literature and learning from one another contributed to the reciprocal nature of the inquiry.

In his extensive studies of childhood, Corsaro (2011) notes that when researching with young children, establishing rapport takes time and children will begin to ask questions by drawing

the researcher into their playful activities. As mentioned earlier, sixty-four children participated in the research study. Over the course of my study, there were many children who approached me with an interest in sharing their experiences and taking part in the project that would become the book (in the form of my dissertation) about their classrooms. As Smith (1995) noted in her classroom-based research, many of the children “befriended” me through our social and academic interactions. The children I have described in this chapter became my “classroom buddies” as they helped me “to understand the culture of the classroom” (p. 571). My interpretations of the literacy events in the classrooms and children’s responses to contemporary Canadian literature are documented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

The teachers welcomed me in their classrooms from March 2014, when we began planning for the project, until June, at the end of the school year. Our project seemed to follow a natural rhythm as it began after the Spring Break and continued until the beginning of the summer holiday that falls on June 24 in Québec. The teachers decided on a schedule that worked for both of them, which involved me visiting the school regularly for Language Arts two days a week from the end of March until the end of June (see Table 2). The following table shows the timeline as well as the texts that the teachers and I collaboratively decided to focus on. More will be said about the book selection process in the following section.

March 11	Collaborative literacy planning meeting with Madame Mai (Grade One) and Madame Lili (Grade Two) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brunch meeting/introductions • Reviewing research ethics and letters of informed consent • Sharing books and exchanging ideas for teaching
March 26	Collaborative literacy planning meeting with teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing and selecting books for the project • Exploring multiliteracies approach to pedagogy • Developed theme for selecting texts: <i>Les enfants qui parlent aux enfants</i>
Week 1: March 31- April 4	<i>J’ai le droit d’être un enfant</i> (Alain Serres) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions with four classes (Grades One/Two) • Picture book read-aloud and discussion of children’s rights. • Drawing personal response to the text on children’s rights. <i>J’ai le droit...</i>

Week 2: April 7-11	<p><i>Fourchon</i> (Kyo Maclear & Isabelle Arsenault)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture book read-aloud, discussing themes and characters. • Introduce the author and illustrator • <i>Je suis spécial(e)</i>...children's personal responses. (Multiple copies available for children to look at while drawing and writing)
Week 3: April 14-18	<p><i>Fourchon</i> (Kyo Maclear & Isabelle Arsenault)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the book as a whole class or with two classes together (Grades One/Two). • Creating objects or characters with plasticine * Interviews with teachers (literacy history and teaching philosophy)
Week 4: April 12-25	<p><i>Virginia Wolf</i> (Kyo Maclear & Isabelle Arsenault)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture book read-aloud • Discussion of characters and themes of the book • <i>Si je volais</i>...children's personal responses to text
Week 5: April 28-May 2	<p><i>Virginia Wolf</i> (Kyo Maclear & Isabelle Arsenault)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing book trailer • Painting in response to the story: Imagine a place to fly away to when you feel wolfish
Week 6: May 5-9	<p><i>Je suis fou de Vava</i> (Dany Laferrière & Frédéric Normandin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture book read-aloud and discussion • Provide background context by introducing author Dany Laferrière and setting of story in Haiti • Children select a favourite part of the book, find a phrase, and create a visual representation with pastel
Week 7: May 12-16	<p><i>Je suis fou de Vava</i> (Dany Laferrière & Frédéric Normandin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rereading the story • Grade One class write poems from Vieux-Os to Vava and draw a picture (connection to five senses) • Grade Two class write letters to the author; draft letter/review/revise
Week 8: May 19-23	<p><i>Le baiser mauve de Vava</i> (Dany Laferrière & Frédéric Normandin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture book read-aloud and discussion • Draw/rewrite an ending to the story (Grade One) • Poetry writing and illustrating; create a class book of drawings and poetry (Grade Two)
Week 9: May 26-30	<p><i>Le baiser mauve de Vava</i> (Dany Laferrière & Frédéric Normandin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing class murals in response to text * Art Club with Grade Two students began to meet at lunchtime

Week 10: June 2-6	<i>La fête des morts</i> (Dany Laferrière & Frédéric Normandin) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading picture book and discussing text (Grade One only) * Guest visitor: Haitian Canadian Artist workshop with all classes and teachers in school library * Reviewing all books in focus groups in Grade Two
Week 11: June 9-13	<i>Le kimono de Suki</i> (Chieri Uegaki & Stéphane Jorisch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture book read-aloud and discussion • Designing kimonos (Grade One) • Visual response to the text through drawing and painting (Grade Two) * Ongoing focus groups with children
Week 12: June 16-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final week with classes • Grade One literacy centre activities (origami, collage, Japanese writing) • Field trip to the Montréal Botanical Gardens with visit to Chinese and Japanese Garden and Insectarium. • Focus groups with children • Teacher Interview (reflecting on literacy project)
Week 13: June 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Interview (reflecting on literacy project)

Table 2. Overview of the Literacy Project and timeframe (March-June 2014).

SELECTING THE BOOKS

The teachers and I collaboratively selected the Canadian picture books addressing issues of identity, community, and belonging. I brought a selection of possible titles for the teachers to borrow on the first visit, and a few more on the second visit. When we looked at the books together during our literacy meeting on March 26, 2014 and decided on which texts we would read, we discussed the topics in the books and how they could be connected to one another. Furthermore, we explored how the project could enable a diversity of voices to be heard in the classroom, particularly by reading books by authors and illustrators of diverse backgrounds, to contribute to rich classroom discussions within the local Montréal school context. I met with the teachers to share and discuss ideas for the project, including the selection of texts around a theme that emerged from our discussion. Although we made an initial literature selection, I continued to look for titles that may interest the teachers and children.

For instance, one of the books that we read by Dany Laferrière, *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, was published during the time of the project, so we did not know it would be available when we first selected the books. As it happened, reading more than one story by this author had a very big impact on the children's responses, and even led to the children in Grade One asking to read a third book by the same author. It was important for us to remain open and flexible in working with the classes throughout as we discovered the literature together. The literature opened many doors for conversations and connections to be made between the children and teachers.

To guide our initial selection in March 2014, we decided on the theme of *Children Speaking with Children*, or *Les enfants qui parlent aux enfants*. The books that we read in each month are outlined in Table 3. The teachers were drawn to literature narrated by children or told from a child's perspective that would capture the interests of an audience of young readers aged 6-8 years old. There were many possible choices, but we narrowed down our selection so that we would have approximately two books per month. I have outlined the selection of books in Table 3. In addition to the main selection, the teachers read other books as complementary readings and others they were interested in for future projects. The teachers were also drawn to the picture books with quality and colourful visual images that enhanced the verbal narrative. The teachers' interest in exploring the visual aspect of reading picture books greatly contributed to the children's experiences with visual literacy. As a result of our collaborative meeting, we focused on reading approximately two children's books each month from April to June, with approximately two weeks allotted for each picture book. The selected picture books are listed with short annotations in Table 3.

April 2014	<p>Serres, Alain. (2009). <i>J'ai le droit d'être un enfant</i>. Paris: Rue du monde. (Illustrations by Auralia Fronty).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An introduction to children's rights based on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, from a child's perspective.
April 2014	<p>Maclear, Kyo. (2011) <i>Fourchon</i>. Montréal: La Pastèque. (Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault). French translation by Fanny Britt of <i>Spork</i> (Kids Can Press).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spork, the child of a spoon and a fork, tries to fit in with the other kitchen cutlery, but he is always left out and teased for being different. Being a mix of both spoon and fork, Spork longs to find a place where he is valued and respected. <p>Maclear, Kyo (2012) <i>Virginia Wolf</i>. Montréal: La Pastèque. (Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault). French translation by Fanny Britt of <i>Virginia Wolf</i> (Kids Can Press).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virginia won't get out of bed; she's feeling 'wolfish' and howling at everyone in the house. Her sister Vanessa uses creativity and her art box to draw and paint the world of 'Bloomsberry', bringing light and a healthy dose of colour back into Virginia's life thus transforming her outlook.
May 2014	<p>Laferrière, Dany. (2006). <i>Je suis fou de Vava</i>. Montréal: Les Éditions de la Bagnole. (Illustrations by Frédéric Normandin).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vieux-Os is madly in love with Vava, but he is far too nervous to let her know his true feelings. He spends the summer in Petit-Goâve lying on the porch of his grandmother's house, listening to her stories, playing soccer with his friends, and thinking about Vava. <p>Laferrière, Dany. (2014). <i>Le baiser mauve de Vava</i>. Montréal, Québec: Les Éditions de la Bagnole.* (Illustrations by Frédéric Normandin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vieux-Os is worried about Vava, who is terribly sick and cannot leave her bed. Meanwhile, Petit-Goâve is under the rule of dictator in Haiti—soldiers are patrolling the village and everyone has a curfew. Vieux-Os listens to his grandmother's wisdom and expresses his love for Vava through poetry.
June 2014	<p>Laferrière, Dany. (2009). <i>La fête des morts</i>. Montréal, Québec: Les Éditions de la Bagnole. (Haiti)** (Illustrations by Frédéric Normandin).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vieux-Os learns about the Haitian celebration of <i>la fête des morts</i> when he visits the cemetery with his friend Franz. Through conversations with his friend and with his grandmother, he learns about the importance of keeping the memory of loved ones alive. <p>Uegaki, Chieri. (2003). <i>Le kimono de Suki</i>. Markham, ON: Les éditions scholastic. (Illustrations by Stéphane Jorisch). French translation by Marie-Andrée Clarimont of <i>Suki's Kimono</i> (Kids Can Press).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suki is proud of her kimono, a special gift from her grandmother. She boldly and courageously stands up for herself when she is teased at school for wearing something 'different'.

Table 3. Children's literature selected for the classroom study.

* *Le baiser mauve de Vava* was published during the study in 2014, and the teachers and children were excited to read another book by the same author.

** The Grade One class read *La fête des morts* based on the interest of the children and teacher, although it was not part of our initial selection.

The teachers and I collaborated on planning and co-leading the literacy activities related to the picture books that we were reading. I provided the teachers with copies of the children's books we selected for the classroom.⁴ We worked together in the classrooms in the mornings two days a week, alternating groups on different days in their bilingual program. In the afternoons on those days, I worked with small groups of children in Grade One or Two, often in the library, a conference room, or another classroom that was available. In our collaborations, the teachers and I had ongoing discussions about issues presented in the books, the illustrations, as well as activities to engage children's responses. I observed as well as co-facilitated activities two days a week, on Wednesday and Thursday, allowing me to spend time with the teachers with both of their groups of children. The teachers planned for one-hour Language Arts periods.

In our collaborative literacy meetings and in the interviews, the teachers shared ideas related to what they would like to do with their classes to promote engagements with literature, and we discussed various possibilities of exploring the visual and verbal narratives of picture books. Throughout the research study, we shared literacy resources related to teaching language arts. We discussed teaching ideas in our meetings, at lunch hours, or via electronic mail. For example, in addition to the children's books, we looked at various multimedia such as UNICEF teaching resources on children's rights.

In my role as a collaborator and co-facilitator of literacy activities, I was continuously searching for materials and resources to enhance the experience of reading the picture books; the teachers did the same. We created and displayed posters related to texts that we were reading, with photos of the authors and illustrators. During individual reading time, there was also time for

⁴ I was able to purchase the picture books with funds from my FQRSC doctoral fellowship. The books remained in the school and classrooms following the study.

children to look at multilingual texts that I had found in local libraries, such as those in heritage languages spoken by children in the classroom including Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, Tagalog, and Spanish. Although the multilingual texts were not central to this research study, it was an important way of connecting with children and valuing their ‘funds of knowledge’. Globes, maps, and posters of flags around the world also served as resources, adding to our conversations of the location of the stories we read (i.e. Haiti) and the connections to the children’s own heritage (i.e. Tamil). Reciprocity was a key element of the collaborative process with the children and teachers as we were learning from, and sharing stories with, one another.

When the teachers would read aloud from the selected picture books to their classes, I observed the interactions of teachers and the children and took observational fieldnotes. The teachers invited me to share some information about the books, authors, and illustrators and they also invited me to be a part of the conversations taking place during the read-alouds. Moreover, the teachers occasionally invited me to read to their classes. For instance, when the Grade One teacher was away from school for one week, she asked me if I could read the story *Je suis fou de Vava* so that her students would not miss out on the activities. The Grade Two teacher and I occasionally alternated reading stories to her classes. In this way, I played the role of co-teacher. While the children engaged in literacy response activities, I co-facilitated by setting up art materials, offering information on the books, and working with small groups of children in the classroom.

In addition to the language arts periods, I offered to work with small groups of children in the afternoon, outside of the classroom. During this time, I facilitated activities with children who may have missed the morning activity or who were interested in having more time to work on a literacy activity, particularly visual arts.

As is common for researchers using an ethnographic-informed approach, my role as a researcher in the school extended well beyond the classroom. I joined conversations in the staff room, the teachers asked me to join in school events such as the Track and Field Day and a Spring Variety Show that took place in the evening in June, and I was invited to a Volunteer Luncheon hosted by the staff. Each of the events that took place were opportunities to observe children’s

language and literacy practices and the place of stories in the school community. For instance, even when outside for the track and field event, some of the children spoke to me about the books we were reading. While we were walking out to the field, Shuja, a boy in Grade One, asked me whether we would be reading more books about Vava, and then the children around him began to talk about the character in the book. While at the school volunteer luncheon in the library, staff members spoke to me about literature and projects they were working in with their classes. The stories became topics of discussion around the school.

Madame Lili often made displays in the hallway and at the front entrance of the school with the work created as part of this project by the children. The children were proud to see their work displayed and this led to further conversations about the books and authors. Madame Mai occasionally took her projects with her to the staff room and also included the work in the student's portfolios. Therefore, teaching and support staff noticed the children's artwork in the hallways or when they dropped into the classes in the middle of an activity. Even the daycare staff at the school became interested in the project as they saw the colourful artwork on display in the hall. It felt as though a community was all working to support children in their engagement with art by encouraging it to become woven into the fabric of the everyday life in the school.

The teachers of various classes, classroom assistants, lunchtime supervisors, principal, and daycare providers also became involved in the project and showed an interest in listening to the children talk about their work (i.e. such as bulletins displaying the artwork in the hallway or the book of poetry and drawings created by the Grade Two class). One of the lunchtime supervisors, noting the students' paintings and the stories we were reading by Dany Laferrière, offered to put me in touch with a Haitian Canadian artist from a local art collective. This contact led to an interesting visit by the local artist who came to the school and shared his paintings with all of the Grades One and Two students. The artist's visit to the school was of interest to the children and teachers, particularly when he spoke about Haiti and about artistic styles, which tied into the stories that we were reading by Dany Laferrière.

As a culminating activity of the project, the teachers and I decided to plan a visit to Montréal's *Jardin botanique* in June. Taking a field trip together was a way for us to celebrate our learning and take it outdoors, spending time together in nature. Many of the books that we read had featured natural environments, such as the garden in *Virginia Wolf*, the outdoor Japanese festival in *Le kimono de Suki*, and the outdoor spaces where the children play in Haiti in Dany Laferrière's stories. This was following the reading of *Le kimono de Suki*. As it happened, the Japanese Garden had a temporary exhibit on kimonos and another on Japanese calligraphy and this was an excellent follow-up to the book. We invited parents to volunteer on the field trip, and we rented a school bus to take us to the gardens, with support from the school administration. On our garden visit, many parents joined us on the trip, as well as the English Grades One and Two teachers and several classroom assistants.



Figure 3. Montréal Japanese Garden art exhibit on calligraphy.

DATA GATHERING

In this section, I will describe the methods for gathering data in this study. The multi-faceted and visual nature of this qualitative study involved diverse sources of data gathering; I have outlined these methods in the following chart (see Table 4):

DATA GATHERING METHOD	DESCRIPTION	TIME PERIOD
<i>Collaborative literacy meetings with teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory meeting to discuss collaboration and explore interests. • Second meeting for sharing ideas for teaching and selecting books. This meeting was audio-recorded. 	March-April 2014
<i>Teacher interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial interview explored teachers' literacy histories and interests in literature. • Second interview explored teachers' reflections on the literacy project. • Audio-recorded. 	Interview 1: April 2014 Interview 2: June 2014
<i>Fieldnotes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observational notes during and after story read-alouds and classroom discussion related to the text, and literacy activities. 	March-June 2014
<i>Informal conversations with children during classroom literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-facilitation of literacy response activities in the classroom, such as drawing and painting. • Documented in fieldnotes during the activities and later in reflection. • Audio-recorded informal conversations with children in small groups or individually in the classroom. 	March-June 2014
<i>Group literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I worked with small groups of children in creative literacy activities in small groups outside of the classroom (i.e. library) such as drawing and painting. • Fieldnotes during or after the activities and/or audio-recordings. 	April-June 2014
<i>Focus groups with children</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children were invited to share their perspectives on picture books. • Fieldnotes during the meetings or audio-recordings. 	June 2014
<i>Photos</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs of literacy activities in the classroom and in the library, children's work, and literacy displays or book centres, the trip to the Japanese Garden. 	March-June 2014

DATA GATHERING METHOD	DESCRIPTION	TIME PERIOD
<i>Artifacts of children's work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts created by children (drawing, painting, writing, etc.) 	March-June 2014
<i>Research journal and memos</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My own reflections on the research project and ongoing analysis 	March 2014-present

Table 4. Data gathering methods.

COLLABORATIVE LITERACY MEETINGS

Collaboration is a central aspect of this study, particularly given the focus on shared literacy practices and classroom community. Our collaborative literacy meetings were very much grounded in the philosophy of sharing and reciprocal learning. These meetings took place as we planned for the project in March and April, and met at lunchtime. Through our sharing of the literature in the collaborative meetings I learned more about the teacher's interests. For example, Madame Lili was already familiar with the author Dany Laferrière, although this was the first time she had seen his picture books and she was delightfully intrigued. Madame Mai also brought her enthusiasm for exploring new books, such as *Le kimono de Suki*. As we gathered in a small conference room at the school over lunchtime in March, the teachers shared their interests in particular stories and how they imagined children would respond. In the lively discussion, the teachers expressed with heartfelt emotion their thoughts about the stories and how they related to children. This was an important step in our collaboration as the teachers and I looked closely at the books, considering the literary elements such as themes, narrative, plot, and characters as well as the aesthetic elements of illustration and design. Most importantly, the meetings provided us with a shared space to consider the voices of children in the stories. The excerpt below illustrates the teacher's discussion of two texts *Je suis fou de Vava* and *Le kimono de Suki*, and their own responses to these texts.⁵

⁵ All translations by the author.

Madame Lili:	<i>Là-dedans (Je suis fou de Vava) il (Dany Laferrière) raconte sa vie quand il était enfant à Petit-Goâve. Comment c'est les jeux avec d'autres enfants. Puis comment il était amoureux de la petite fille qui s'appelait Vava.</i>	In this story, he writes about his childhood in Petit-Goâve. How he played with other children. And how he was madly in love with a little girl named Vava.
Madame Mai:	<i>Mmmm. Dans la robe jaune.</i>	Mmm. In her yellow dress.
Madame Lili:	<i>Oui, à la fin elle réussit à lui envoyer un bec et il se sauve. C'est vraiment mignon. Mais c'est vraiment raconté avec les mots d'un enfant. Puis...</i>	Yes, and at the end she finally sends him a kiss and he runs away. It's really adorable. But it is really told in the words of a child.
Heather:	<i>Oui, c'est ça.</i>	Yes, that's it.
Madame Lili:	<i>Ça c'est trouver les histoires à l'hauteur de l'enfant. Le vocabulaire. Ce serait bien. On peut leur demander, eux, qu'est-ce qu'ils vivent.</i>	It's finding books that are written at the level of the child. The vocabulary. This one would be good. We can ask them about their lives.
Heather:	<i>Exactement.</i>	Exactly.
Madame Lili:	<i>On pourrait commencer peut-être par une photo d'eux-mêmes. Il parle de comment c'est leur vie. Qu'est-ce que... combien de personnes dans leur famille. S'ils font des activités...</i>	We could start maybe with a photo of the children. They could talk about how their life is, what... how many people are in their family, what kind of activities they do, etc.
Madame Mai:	<i>Les images sont vraiment colorées. Donc ils vont être vraiment captivés.</i>	And the illustrations are really colourful. They will be totally captivated.
Madame Lili:	<i>C'est tellement beau.</i>	It's really beautiful.
Madame Mai:	<i>Donc, ça c'est bon. Et Le kimono de Suki.</i>	So, this is a good one. And <i>Suki's Kimono</i> .
Madame Lili:	<i>Je l'ai pas lu.</i>	I haven't read it yet.

Madame Mai:

Tu n'a pas lu. J'ai la version française. Dans le fond, elle est Japonaise. Elles sont trois soeurs. La première journée d'école, bien elle décide de mettre son kimono. Parce que sa grand-mère est venue visiter du Japon. Puis là, les deux soeurs veulent rien savoir. Elles sont comme 'je vais marcher deux pas plus vite parce que je ne veux pas m'associer à toi'. C'est comme 'pourquoi tu vas à l'école avec ce kimono?'. Tsé. Puis là à la fin de la journée, tout le monde avait l'attention sur elle, parce qu'elle a raconté son histoire de quand sa grand-mère est venue. Comment elle a fait les danses. Comment était le festival. Puis les autres sont comme 'bien là-ils n'ont même pas regardé mon nouveau chandail [Laughter]. Ça c'est la fin. Et elle est super contente. Tsé.

Heather:

Et fière de son identité.

Madame Mai:

C'est mignon...puis, l'image: la prof elle dit, raconte ton été, puis tout le monde écoute.

You haven't read it. I have the French version. Basically, she is Japanese. There are three sisters. It's the first day of school, so she decides to put on her kimono. Her grandmother had visited from Japan. And then, the two sisters want nothing to do with her. They are like, 'I am going to walk two steps faster because I don't want to be associated with you.' It's like, 'why are you going to school with this kimono?' You know. And then at the end of the day, everyone was admiring her because she had told her story about her grandmother visiting. How they had danced together. How the festival was. And the other sisters are like, 'Oh, they didn't even look at my new sweater' [Laughter]. That's the end. And she's really happy. You know.

And proud of her identity.

It's cute...and the picture, the teacher she says, tell me about your summer and then everyone listens.

Collaborative literacy meeting, March 26, 2014

The collaborative literacy meetings with the teachers were key in selecting and taking the time to talk about literature together. By discussing the texts, such as *Je suis fou de Vava* and *Le kimono de Suki*, the teachers shared their interpretations of the stories and how they related to issues of identity and diversity, from the perspectives of children. Both of the teachers described the diverse backgrounds of the children in their classrooms, many who were learning French as an additional language (Fieldnotes, March 11, 2014). They had not previously read literature with their students that they considered to be multicultural, but were very open to exploring and interested to read new books with their classes. When I asked the teachers about whether they had read Canadian children's literature in their classroom, one of the teachers mentioned that she planned to read a

book about the *cabane à sucre* to her class (a traditional French Canadian experience) as they were taking a class field trip. This collaboration provided an opportunity for the teachers and I to learn from one another as we selected contemporary Canadian picture books by diverse authors to read with the children. One of the purposes of the project was to understand how children and teachers would engage with reading contemporary children's books dealing with complex themes, and how the children would respond to such texts in the classroom. As noted by Johnston (2006),

Official policies of multiculturalism, issues of human rights, and antiracist teaching philosophies have increased teachers' awareness that changes need to be made to what they teach and how. Yet these policies have done little to help teachers understand how complex questions of representation are intertwined with issues of culture, race, gender, and ethnicity or to comprehend what it means to initiate new reading practices in the schools. (p. 118)

The two initial collaborative literacy meetings in March set us off on a journey of learning together for the next several months. Our conversations continued throughout the project.

TEACHER INTERVIEWS

The interviews with the teachers were open-ended and in-depth (Seidman, 2006), enabling opportunities for us to engage in conversation regarding the teachers' perspectives on literacy, pedagogy, and children's literature. As mentioned previously, the first interview was held in the early stages of the research in April and the second interview was held at the end of the school year in June, with each teacher. The interviews were 30-45 minutes in length and took place either during the teacher's prep period or at lunch. The location of the interviews was in the teacher's classroom, conference room, or staff room, according to the teacher's preference. Interviews are "understood as collaborative, communicative events that evolve their own norms and rules" (Ellis & Berger, 2002, p. 851; see Briggs, 1986; Kvale, 1996). Drawing on a body of research on interactive interviews, Ellis and Berger maintain that researcher involvement in the interview process can "close the hierarchical gap between researcher and respondents that traditional interviewing encourages"

(p. 851). Furthermore, Strong-Wilson (2006) notes that interviews also provide “a context for teacher reflection” (p. 104). In the first interview, I asked questions such as “*Tell me about your teaching experience? What interests you about this project?*” In the second interview, I asked the teachers questions such as: “*What was your experience of reading and teaching with these texts? What did you notice? Were there questions and issues that you found interesting?*” (see **Appendix VI**).

FIELDNOTES AND RESEARCH JOURNAL

My fieldnotes included observation notes and reflections in my classroom visits during Language Arts and literacy activities with children. I kept my field notebook with me to write down my observations. I explained to the children and teachers that I was taking notes for the book (my dissertation) that I was working on. Throughout the project, I noted children’s responses to literature, interactions with students and teachers, relationships and classroom/school community. At times, writing notes was challenging as I was actively involved with facilitating activities or reading to the classes. Therefore, some of my notes I would write down following a class activity, at lunchtime, or after school. When teachers were reading to the class and leading classroom discussions, I would write down notes about these discussions and interactions that took place in the classroom. The children took an interest in my notebook, and occasionally asked me about what I was writing. For example, while observing the Grade One classroom following the reading of *Virginia Wolf*, one of the girls named Asha asked me to be sure to write down their responses to the text, as I describe in my research memo below,

I have found that the children and teachers are playing an active role in the research process, as it is also connected to the learning and teaching process. For example, the children notice that I take fieldnotes and pay close attention to their responses to stories. Yesterday in Grade One, as the children were sharing their responses with the teacher after reading Virginia Wolf, they were listening to one another’s creative ideas and suddenly a girl called out enthusiastically: ‘Miss Heather, could you write down what they’re saying?’ (Research journal, May 2, 2014)

INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

By engaging in conversations and observing, my research also focused “on the actual ‘doing’ of the drawing” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 32) and painting as children sometimes talked about or showed me how they engaged with this process. Furthermore, when children shared verbally about their drawings or paintings (Mitchell et al., 2011), I was able to understand more about their meaning-making process.

As a result of the stories that we read and discussed, related to themes of children’s rights and community, the children often shared about their own experiences of languages, geographies, families, religions, hobbies, and passions.

LITERACY GROUP ACTIVITIES

These afternoon activities in small groups were open-ended and allowed time for conversation, expressions of identity, and friendship (Paley, 1997). For many children, they wanted to continue painting or drawing what they had started in the language arts class. This was an important part of the “narrative continuity” (Paley, 1997, p. 74) that the stories offered over time and enriched the children’s engagement with literature. While we worked and played, we continued discussions related to literature we were reading (Arizpe & Styles, 2003). In my first weeks in the school, we worked in a small conference room. Later on we began to work in the library when it was available. Working in the library was an ideal setting for literacy activities, particularly with the large open space with room to either work on the floor or at the small round tables. Being in the library was a rich place for finding and discovering new books as well, and sometimes we read books that we found on display or on the shelves.

Having time to work with small groups in the library provided children with an opportunity to continue working on what we had started in the Language Arts class. For example, below is a photo of the mural that we had started in Grade One after reading *Le baiser mauve de Vava*. When we did not have time to complete it in the classroom, the teacher and I decided that I could continue with small groups to come to the library and draw on the mural.



Figure 4. Grade One group art in the library (*Le baiser mauve de Vava*).

The children expressed a keen interest in working in small groups, particularly drawing or painting. For some children, it was the first time they had taken part in an activity outside of the classroom. Working in the library was a motivation for students to engage in literacy, as I noted by the children's enthusiasm.

FOCUS GROUPS WITH CHILDREN

I planned to hold focus groups, at the end of the school year, with the children to gain further insight into their perspectives on the literature. In June, Grades One and Two children were invited to participate in focus groups to reflect and discuss their experiences with the literature and project. At the time of the focus groups, I was familiar with the children and the context due to my participant observation in the classrooms.

There were approximately 4-5 children participating in each of the groups. The focus groups were approximately 20-30 minutes in length. Due to the classroom schedules of each of the individual teachers and availability of time for children to participate in focus groups during the month of June, I held more focus groups with the children in the Grade Two classes than the Grade One classes. The conversations took place in either English or French, according to the children's preference, and the children could speak in the language they chose. At times, the children shared a few words in other languages, such as Spanish and Urdu in the focus groups, which was an opportunity for others to hear, share, and learn different words in minority languages, as I encouraged them to do so as a way of validating all languages.

These focus group conversations were open-ended and took place in the school library where we sat at a round table to discuss the literature and the children's experiences. Eder and Fingerson (2002) write that it is important to allow children to "give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives" (p. 181). To gain the perspectives of children, I had questions to prompt our conversations on the literature such as: *How do you like listening to your teacher read stories? Is there a book that you enjoyed reading with your class? What did you like about it? Was there part of the story that you found interesting?* (see Appendix VII for interview prompts).

While we had our focus groups, we took time to revisit the stories, to draw, and to talk. The children seemed to enjoy taking part in these conversations and sharing their opinions. Art supplies were made available so that children could engage in drawing or painting, or creating with playdough while we engaged in conversation. I also displayed the picture books we had read to the meetings, as well as brought the children's artwork or projects to prompt conversations, and posters of the creators of the books. As the children had worked with me in small groups throughout the project, often in the library, this was an ideal setting for the focus groups to take place in as we were surrounded with children's books and had comfortable tables and chairs.

It was also important for the children to have the chance to ask questions in the focus groups. Furthermore, as noted by Eder and Fingerson (2002), "By encouraging respondents

to initiate questions and comments, the interviewer breaks down basic power dimension of the interview context by personalizing or humanizing him-or-herself and empowering the respondents” (p. 185). In the following example, Jalindu was asking me to reflect on my own experience as a researcher working with the children. Her questions highlight the importance of listening to children’s questions. It is also an example of how we were all reflecting on the experience of participating in reading literature together during the project. Furthermore, the conversation also is an example of the reciprocity of the focus group, as I was self-disclosing about my own experience in the project along with the participants (Eder & Fingerson, 2002).

- Jalindu:** Miss Heather. When you first come to see us what do you thought? Like, what do you thought?
- Heather:** Oh, that’s a good question. You know, the first time I came in this school...
- Jalindu:** Yeah.
- Heather:** I knew I was in a special place.
- Jalindu:** Whoah!
- Heather:** I had a good feeling...and the first time I came in Grade Two...
- Anita:** Yeah.
- Heather:** I was so happy to see and meet everyone in the class. And the first day we read a book about children’s rights.
- Jalindu:** Yeah.
- Heather:** The rights of children. Like the right to go to school, the right to eat...
- Jalindu:** Yeah.
- Heather:** The right to play, the right to speak different languages.
- Arjuna:** Can you read the book? ‘Cause I like it!

Focus group interview, June 2014

An interesting and valuable aspect of the focus groups, was that they allowed for the “children’s own conversational styles to appear” (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 191). The ways the conversations flowed, as will be described in detail in Chapter Five, showed me the ways that children communicated. Eder and Fingerson (2002) note that group interviews with children are an effective way of gaining understandings of children’s collective interpretations of media. For this reason, the focus group conversations were useful in providing the opportunity for children to share about their interpretations of picture books.

ARTIFACTS OF CHILDREN’S WORK

As this project is grounded in the notion of listening to children’s responses to literature and taking seriously the work of children, the multimodal data collected reflects a variety of responses produced by children in the classrooms (Falchi et al., 2014; Mavers, 2011). The multiple responses from children in this research provided a range of artifacts of children’s drawing, painting, and writing. I consider the sites of production, image, and audiencing (Rose, 2012) of the children’s visual responses to picture books, as well as the notion of children’s text making (Kress, 1997; Mavers, 2011) as meaningful work. In this context, the children’s drawings and paintings themselves are a prominent aspect of the study of children’s responses to contemporary Canadian picture books. As Rose (2012) argues, a critical approach to visual methodology necessarily involves taking images seriously. Citing Rose, Mitchell et al. (2011) note that,

No visual product can be neutral: The drawing is produced by a specific individual in a particular space and time...The drawer’s context (both present and past) must colour what is drawn, how it is drawn, and what the drawing represents. (p. 25)

The teachers and I planned for activities each week in the language arts classroom in response to the stories. The time that I had to work with small groups in the afternoon also allowed for children to have more time to continue working on their projects. I was particularly interested in how children would express themselves by responding visually, that is, through drawing or painting. The activities involved exploring with a variety of materials including crayons, pastels, paints, and

plastecine. Students also wrote poems, composed letters to the author, and worked collaboratively on creating wall murals to represent the scenes and characters of stories. I made copies of the children's drawings and paintings, and returned their original work to them. The Grade Two teacher chose to display the work of the students in the hallway outside the classroom and in the main entrance of the school, which prompted conversations about the children's work. The Grade One teacher included samples of the children's work in their portfolios along with a note about the research project, to present to parents during an open-house evening in the school. While doing my fieldwork, I presented the research at a national conference (Phipps, 2014), and let the children and teachers know that they would be shared with educators from across Canada. Many of the children commented that they were eager to take their artwork home to show their families. I explore the analysis of this data in Chapters Five and Seven.

PHOTOGRAPHY

I took photos of classroom literacy activities, children's art, and literacy projects (drawings, paintings, writing), the classroom environment (book displays, reading area), and library. I also took photos at the Botanical Gardens, in preparation for our field trip in June, and brought the photos to the classes to show them where they would be going together. Some of the children also took photos on my camera, either of their own artwork or even of me in the classroom and on the playground. The photographs provide a visual documentation of the project and collaboration, which portray the research site as well as my lived experience as a researcher. As noted by Butler-Kisber (2010), in the past three decades, there has been "an increasing interest in the use of visual images in research because of its power to evoke emotional, embodied responses and mediate different understandings" (p. 124-125). The photos have been a way for me to think reflexively on my research process. In particular, they have helped me to recall the research context and community of the classrooms while working on my analysis of literacy practices and pedagogy.

POSITIONALITY: SITUATING MYSELF IN THE FIELDWORK

The life of the project evolved as I became more familiar with the context of this school and as the teachers and children became more familiar with me. As mentioned previously, our learning together was reciprocal and relational in that we shared the experience of reading together and learning from one another. Furthermore, through both observation and dialogue, the children and teachers shared with me about their interests in literature and stories, as well as their passions and talents. In this section, I will describe the interactive nature of this research inquiry in the early childhood classrooms. By living alongside the children and teachers, I was able to become familiar with their daily joys and challenges.

To begin to establish a relationship with the children, it seemed appropriate that I would introduce myself to the children by reading a story on children's rights and talking about how their opinions were valuable. I chose to read aloud the book *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant* (Serres, 2009), which addresses the rights of the child, as a way to introduce the project, given the project's focus on listening to and respecting children. The teachers welcomed this idea and suggested that I lead an activity with the classes on my first day in the classroom. It was energizing and revitalizing to be with the children and teachers in the classroom and to hear their perspectives and responses to literature.

The children and teachers encouraged me to think further about my own role as a researcher and educator and what it means to engage in research in multilingual and multicultural Montréal, and also shed light on the necessity of having a level of religious literacy (Moore, 2007) to work within this context. I also told the children that I was interested to learn more about what they thought about the stories that we would read together and that they could ask questions at anytime. As I spent more time in the classrooms, the children asked more questions, and we continued to learn from one another. Their questions provoked my own thinking about research and pedagogy. The children were eager to share their thoughts in various ways, through speaking, drawing, painting, writing, singing, and playing. Reading literature sparked rich discussions and artistic responses, as subsequent chapters will articulate in further detail, particularly Chapter Five, where I focus on children's responses.

Rasmeen, a Grade Two student who speaks English and Punjabi at home, expressed a strong connection to her languages and culture. Carrying herself confidently in the classroom and on the playground, Rasmeen took her work seriously, and yet also displayed a sense of humour and contagious laughter when discussing stories and life experiences. In my first few days at the school, she approached me with an interest in participating in the stories and literary response activities. For example, on my third visit to her classroom, Rasmeen commented to me, “*I liked the activity we did last week*” (Fieldnotes, March, 2015). The previous week we had read the book *Fourchon* and she had shared with me about being proud of her mother’s beauty salon. I recalled that we had spent time talking together about the meaning of her choice of words in response to the story *Fourchon*.

When I learned of the languages spoken by children in the classroom, I searched in the local libraries for multilingual books, such as stories in Urdu, Spanish, Tamil, Punjabi, and Tagalog. Pictured below (Figure 5) is a photo taken on International Book Day, when I visited the multilingual children’s literature section of the library of Parc Extension after school and borrowed books in Urdu and Tamil for children in the Grade Two class. The rose in the photo was given by the librarian to celebrate International Book Day. I also borrowed a CD of Bob Marley’s music, which I played on my drives to and from the school, as some of his songs had come up in conversation, particularly with the Grade One students.



Figure 5. Literacy treasures found in local library.

Learning and teaching became reciprocal as the teachers, children, and I shared with each other. While we read together from the selected texts, the teachers and some of the children began to suggest books that they thought I would enjoy reading, and even brought in books to share with me in exchange for books that I brought to the school. The children often spoke about texts they read at home, and one girl in Grade Two, Marisol, who had a strong interest in visual arts, proudly brought in an informational book about drawing and art to show to us. On the day she brought the book, Marisol called out to me from down the hall to announce that she had a book to show me! As such, my research project became deeply informed by the culture and community of the school. I gained an understanding of the connections that are made among children and teachers through the experience of sharing stories.

The children's enthusiasm led to the creation of a lunchtime art club with Grade Two students, in late May until the end of June (about three weeks), with the Grade Two children who proposed that we meet regularly in the library at lunch to eat and draw. On one occasion, the

principal dropped in to the art club and was pleasantly surprised at the number of Grade Two students who had taken up an interest in drawing. She expressed her support for this activity exclaiming with a smile, “Wow, you’re all in the Drawing Club!” The children delighted in her acknowledgement. By having a voluntary art club outside of the school time, the children and I became even more familiar with one another through creative work and play. Being surrounded by an extensive collection of children’s books in the school library and having the opportunity to draw and paint was a way that the children and I created a third space within the context of the school. The news of the art club spread by word of mouth among the Grade Two students, and it was interesting for me to see that many of the boys and girls were eager to be there. On visits to volunteer and read with children at the school, prior to the research study, children still ask about continuing art club.

WORKING WITH THE DATA

I have summarized the data from both Grades One and Two classes in two charts below. These included the various multimodal activities with the children responding to the children’s literature.

2 GROUPS: 31 CHILDREN, 1 FRENCH TEACHER	
DESCRIPTION	DATA OBTAINED
2 initial teacher collaborative meetings in March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldnotes • Audio-recording of second meeting
Initial interview with Grade One teacher in April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recorded
<i>J’ai le droit d’être un enfant</i> introduction activity Reading response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldnotes • 12 drawings of children’s rights
<i>Fourchon / Spork</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 12 photos of children’s drawing and written responses • 3 photos of invented objects children made with plastecine

2 GROUPS: 31 CHILDREN, 1 FRENCH TEACHER	
DESCRIPTION	DATA OBTAINED
<i>Virginia Wolf</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 22 drawings/written responses • 22 paintings of a special or imagined place
<i>Je suis fou de Vava</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 4 paintings • 15 pastel drawings/five senses letters
<i>Le baiser mauve de Vava</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 13 drawings/written responses • 10 photos of wall mural <i>Le baiser mauve</i> • Conversations
<i>La fête des morts</i> <i>Literacy activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes
<i>Le kimono de Suki</i> <i>Literacy activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 3 photos of kimonos • 20 photos of classroom centre activities (origami, Japanese writing, collage)
<i>Classroom environment/ literacies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 photos of Grade One classroom
<i>Literacy activities in the library</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes and/or audio-recordings of conversations
<i>Playground at recess</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 photos on playground of me outside, taken on my camera by a participant
<i>Field trip to Botanical Garden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 photos during visit • 61 photos pre- and post-field trip in preparation and reflection • Journal reflection
<i>Painting by all children made with guest artist</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 photos of painting made by all the children in Grades One/Two
<i>Interview with teacher in June</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recorded conversation reflecting on literacy project and teaching with literature
<i>Research journal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My own reflections and observations as a participant observer in the classrooms

Table 5. Summary of data in Grade One.

2 GROUPS: 33 CHILDREN, 1 FRENCH TEACHER	
DESCRIPTION	DATA OBTAINED
2 initial teacher collaborative meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldnotes • Audio-recording of second meeting
Initial interview with Grade Two teacher in April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recorded conversation
<i>J'ai le droit d'être un enfant</i> introduction to children's rights and research project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldnotes • 22 drawings of children's rights
<i>Fourchon / Spork</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 23 drawings/written responses by children • 2 photos of display on hallway bulletin • 3 photo inventions • Conversations
<i>Virginia Wolf</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 3 drawings/vocab • 25 paintings of a special imagined place • 7 photos of painting process • 15 photos of book trailer viewing in class • Conversations
<i>Je suis fou de Vava</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 23 paintings/pastel drawings • 12 photos of display • 17 letters to author • Conversations
<i>Le baiser mauve de Vava</i> <i>Literacy activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 21 drawings/poem • 1 photo of poetry writing process • 5 photos of wall murals • Conversations
<i>Le kimono de Suki</i> <i>Literacy activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story read-aloud fieldnotes • 14 paintings • 5 photos of paintings in process • Conversations
<i>Group literacy activities (library or conference room)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes and/or audio-recordings of conversations • 21 photos of artwork

2 GROUPS: 33 CHILDREN, 1 FRENCH TEACHER	
DESCRIPTION	DATA OBTAINED
<i>Photos of library environment/ books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 photos of books and displays in the library
<i>Field Trip: Botanical Garden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 photos during visit • 61 photos pre- and post-field trip in preparation and reflection (on my own)
<i>Painting by all children made with guest artist</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 photos of painting made by all the children in Grades One/Two
<i>Interview with teacher in June</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversation reflecting on literacy project and teaching with literature
<i>Research journal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My reflections as a participant observer in the classrooms

Table 6. Summary of data in Grade Two.

Denzin (1999) notes that the “ethnographic text must be read as a photograph. They can be looked at and read, over and over again, each looking or reading being a new encounter with the text” (p. 44). In my analysis, I am drawing on Denzin’s notion of revisiting the field text as a way to “reveal new ways of looking, seeing, or hearing” (p. 44). I am looking at multiple layers of data, including my observations in the classrooms, classroom artifacts, conversations with children and teachers, and fieldnotes that provide insights into the experiences. I have approached my data analysis inductively. As noted by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), in qualitative research, “data are not grouped according to predetermined categories. Rather, what becomes important is what emerges from the data itself, through a process of inductive reasoning” (p. 116).

My analysis was ongoing from the beginning of my project and has continued throughout the writing of my dissertation. As noted by Butler-Kisber, the analytic process begins early on in the research, “based on what the researcher brings with her to the inquiry, what she pays attention to and sections out of what she is seeing, hearing, and recording and how the field texts are constructed” (p. 30). I continued to work on transcribing and analyzing data in the months

following my fieldwork in the classrooms. Through my writing of the dissertation, I am creating a “montage” (a *mise-en-scène*) that includes the voices of the children and teachers, and my own analysis or interpretative inquiry (Denzin, 1999, p. 41). This montage is presented through the analysis in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven that describe the emerging themes related to the children’s and teachers’ engagements with picture books. In my qualitative analysis of the data, I have applied the method of constant comparison (Butler-Kisber, 2011; Maykut & Moorhouse, 1994) to organize my data analysis into subcategories, categories, and themes. This was not a linear process, but involved rereading and working with data over time, refining, and revising my analysis. For example, I would write notes to myself in the margins of a transcript or in my field notebook.

I continued to revisit my data while working on a coarse-grained analysis of the data (Butler-Kisber, 2010). This process took many months as I became increasingly familiar with the field texts. As noted by Butler-Kisber (2010), a coarse-grained analysis involves “close reading and rereadings or listening and viewing, writing reflective and analytic memos and/or keeping a journal or log” (p. 30-31). In the following example, I have reflected on Asha’s response to one of the first stories that we read together. It was after reviewing my notes, her drawing, and the picture book itself many times, that I wrote this memo,

When I look at Asha’s drawings and reflect on her responses to literature, it is clear that she was eager to respond both visually and verbally to the picture books. As a girl with an outgoing personality, Asha was not shy to share her thoughts and to ask questions. Asha’s interests in using multimodal forms of communication were evident from the start of my time in my classroom. On my first day in their classroom, Asha and her friend Ngozi drew themselves ‘sleeping on the roof’, as their interpretation of the right of children to have time to rest. While drawing, the two girls were laughing and talking, absorbed by the art-making activity. When I asked them about the pictures, they explained to me that they were sleeping on the roof. I asked them if they meant, ‘under the roof’ or ‘sous le toit’, but they insisted that it was on the roof that they were sleeping. I was impressed with their engagement in drawing and imaginative way of thinking.

While looking back at the picture book, my notes, and Asha's drawing from J'ai le droit d'être un enfant, several months later I noticed that the girl in the picture book is warmly tucked into a blanket covered in houses. The girl's arm is folded over the blanket, almost as though it is stretching over the rooftops of the houses. I can see how the girls could have imagined sleeping on the roof by looking at this illustration. (Research memo, December 2015)

The example above illustrates how spending time thinking about and revisiting the data enabled me to make observations related to the children's engagements with literature. At a later point in time, it was brought to my attention that in some contexts, children may actually sleep on the roof in hot weather in countries (i.e. South Asia) where roofs are flat. The story of *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1996) also comes to mind, as the character in that book spends time in the evening, with her family, on the roof of their Harlem apartment, staring up at the sky. Interpretations of literature and of literary response are always partial. My observations and connections across data contributed to the categories and themes that have emerged.

Reading extensively in the areas of children's literary responses, visual and ethnographic methodologies, culturally relevant pedagogy, picture book research, and childhood studies informed my approach to the data analysis, as did my prior experiences as a classroom teacher, research assistant, and graduate student in Education. Sipe and Ghiso (2004) note that the,

Process of data analysis is paradoxical: theoretical frameworks are essential to structuring a study and interpreting data, yet the more perspectives we read about, the greater the danger in over determining conceptual categories and the way we see the data. (p. 473)

In this study, it was important for me to be aware of my own positionality and to ground myself in theories, and yet it was also necessary for me to take a step back from the data and to look closely at the relationship among and between the emerging themes of the data. I needed to learn to listen closely to the way that my data was speaking to me. This involved spending more time reading, viewing, and listening to my data, working with the themes, in a course-grained analysis by "playing with some broad categories in which different portions of the field texts can be placed" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 30-31).

In organizing the various data sources for this ethnography, I am considering how these layers of data respond to the broad question of how listening to children's responses in word and image to contemporary Canadian picture books informs our understanding of children's experiences with literature, as well as the role of the educator in supporting children's engagements with literature.

READING THE VISUAL

My analysis of the children's responses to literature is also based on a close reading of their visual work. I consider the sites of production, image, and audiencing (Rose, 2012) of the children's responses to picture books, as well as the notion of children's text making (Kress, 1997; Mavers, 2011) and drawing (Kendrick & McKay, 2004) as meaningful work. In this context, the children's drawings and paintings themselves are a prominent aspect of the study of children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books. As Rose (2012) argues, a critical approach to visual methodology necessarily involves taking images seriously.

SITES OF PRODUCTION, IMAGE, AND AUDIENCE

Rose (2012) developed a critical framework for visual methodologies based on three sites: the site(s) of production, the site of the image, and the site of the audience. According to Rose, each of the three sites includes technological, compositional, and social modalities. The site of production takes into consideration factors such as how the image was made, the genre, and the artist who made the image and for what purpose. The site of the image includes the visual effects (technique), compositionality, and visual meanings. The site of the audience includes the display of the image, the relationship to other texts, and how it is interpreted. These sites of production, image and audience provide a useful framework for interpreting the data gathered in this study. In viewing the visual images produced by the children, as well as their interactions with the visual literature, I have considered Rose's framework to think about the context and meanings of their visual work and their responses to the picture books.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Given the focus on listening to children, my analysis focuses on the themes that have emerged from these multiple data sources related to the literacy practices in these diverse classroom communities,

The interweaving of data collection and analysis is highly transactional, each activity shedding new light on and enriching the other. The choice of foci for close observation in the field is very much part of the analytic process. (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 165)

The statement by Ely et al. (1997) emphasizes the relationship between data collection and analysis. While in the field, as researchers, we make choices about what we closely observe. In my study in the Grades One and Two classrooms, the time that I was a participant observer involved making choices about observing interactions that children had with the literature, with their teachers, and with one another. Moreover, through the research I also had an awareness of the interactions between myself and the children, teachers, and staff in the classrooms and school. My observations were focused on the stories we read together, as well as the children's multimodal responses to those stories.

In working on a thematic analysis of my data, I have analyzed emerging themes. Thematic analysis is an approach often used in qualitative research (Ely et al., 1997; see also Tesch, 1987). Ely et al. (1997) note that emerging themes are a result of careful thought and reflection on the part of the researcher,

What with all of this emphasis on 'emerging,'...We feel this kind of wording can be misinterpreted to mean that themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them. (p. 205)

At this time, I worked on organizing "chunks of field texts into more refined categories" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 31). Here is an example of an initial chart that I created with chunks of data for the category *Creating with my hands*. The subcategories evolved and were refined further in the process of working with the data.

DATA CHUNK	DATA SOURCE	SUBCATEGORY	CATEGORY
<p>Opal: <i>J'aime faire la peinture parce que c'est comme une activité mais avec tes mains.*</i> <i>Moi, j'aime faire la peinture parce qu'on a beaucoup de couleurs pour utiliser et ça peut faire comme WOW!</i></p>	Literacy response activity in Grade Two classroom, April 2014	<i>Painting...c'est comme une activité mais avec tes mains.</i>	Creating with my hands
<p>Elizabeth: I like painting, and I forget what it's called, it's something like this...</p> <p>Heather: Pastel.</p> <p>Elizabeth: Yeah, pastel. I love working with pastel and painting. Mostly painting because you can do whatever you want. And pastel...It feels kind of like I'm free. Like I can do whatever I want. Like no one's the boss of my painting.</p> <p>Heather: Does anyone else feel like that? Elizabeth said that she feels free.</p> <p>Sara: I have four favourites: Art, drawing, playdough...and when I try it, it just makes me happy. It feels like no one can do anything to me. I can do everything myself.</p> <p>Marjeena: Like unstoppable.</p>	Focus group, June 2014	It feels kind of like I'm free.	Creating with my hands
<p>Marisol: Me gusta pintar por que tienes muchos colores.</p> <p>Opal: Because there are a lot of colours.</p> <p>Nicolas: And she loves colours. Hey, I made dark green!</p> <p>Marisol: <i>Y mi me gusta crear colores.</i></p>	Conversation during classroom literacy activity in Grade Two, April 2014	Making colours	Creating with my hands

Table 7. Example of data analysis.⁶

⁶ Throughout this chapter, emphasis added is indicated by bolded words.

As mentioned previously, I wrote rules of inclusion for the categories. The following is an example of the rule of inclusion for the category *Creating with my hands...*

This category reflects the children's embodied experience of using visual modes of communicating and producing meaning in response to literature. The children emphasized the agency, freedom, and autonomy they experienced in having the opportunity to use visual art media to draw, paint, and create visual responses.

While the categories emerged from the literacy activities in the classroom and the focus groups with children, my analysis of the children's responses to literature is also based on a close reading of their visual productions. As a result of fine-grained analysis (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 30) of the data, I created 12 categories as listed in the table below.

CATEGORY	TITLE
1	Responding to literature by using imagination
2	Creating with my hands
3	Exploring complexity
4	You need to listen to your heart
5	Teachers' literacy histories
6	<i>Il y a rien comme un livre!</i> There is nothing like a book!
7	Teaching in the moment: Spontaneity
8	Navigating the complexity of picture books
9	Fostering a deep engagement with literature
10	You make a difference
11	Deepening community
12	Time and space to read, play, and create together

Table 8. List of categories.

Through a qualitative analysis using constant comparison, I have categorized my data into three major themes that are grounded in my data.

1. All my ideas flow
2. Listening with your heart
3. We are all part of the story

These themes have enabled me to discuss my data according to the emerging perspectives of the children and teachers, as well as the classroom community. I illustrate in the diagram below how these three themes emerged.

CATEGORIES	THEMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to literature by using imagination • Creating with my hands • Exploring complexity All my ideas flow 	<i>All my ideas flow</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need to listen to your heart • Teacher's literacy histories • <i>Il y a rien comme un livre!</i> There is nothing like a book! • Teaching in the moment • Navigating the complexity of picture books • Fostering a deep engagement with literature • You make a difference 	<i>Listening with your heart</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening community • Time and space to read, play, and create together 	<i>We are all part of the story</i>

Table 9. Categories and themes.

The first theme, **all my ideas flow**, reflects the children's engagement with visual literature. In particular, this refers to the children's creative responses as they communicated through speaking and visual arts (drawing and painting) and created their own texts with their hands. I describe each of the categories with examples of children's voices in Chapter Five.

The second theme, **listening with your heart**, refers to the teacher's role in engaging children and listening to their voices. This includes the teachers' approaches to navigating the

complexity of picture books with young children, listening to children's responses, and fostering a deep engagement with literature in the classroom. I describe each of the categories with examples presented in Chapter Six.

The third theme, **we are all part of the story**, refers to the way that visual literature contributes to young readers and educators sharing the experience of reading and creating together in the community of the classroom. I describe each of the categories with examples provided in Chapter Seven.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study involves providing a “coherent and transparent research process”, and demonstrating the researcher's reflexivity in the work (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 14; see also Reissman, 1993).

By visiting the school at least two days each week from late March until the end of the school year in late June, I had a prolonged engagement with the children and teachers in the school. Over time, we built and established relationships. The children became familiar with my routine and started to know the days that I would be in their classes, on either Wednesday or Thursday.

Butler-Kisber (2010) asserts that in addition to spending a significant length of time in the field, “multiple forms of field texts...can help to corroborate explanations” (p. 14). I have included a variety of field texts, everything from conversations with the children, my observational fieldnotes, artifacts of children's work, photographs, and interviews with teachers.

By analyzing data from the context of four different classes of children, two teachers, and my own experience as a researcher, I have included a range of perspectives on the context of reading contemporary children's literature. Each teacher had their unique perspectives, and our collaboration brought about new ideas for the project that would not have come to fruition without the contribution of each individual.

CONCLUSION

In this classroom-based qualitative study, I describe the multi-layered stories that the children, teachers, and I created together through literacy practices, with a focus on listening to children's voices and perspectives. I consider the importance of "treating children as social actors in their own right in contexts where, traditionally, they have been denied those rights of participation and their voices remained unheard" (Christensen & James, 2008, p. 1). For Strong-Wilson and Preece (2009), "one of the main issues at heart in the debate about childhood...ought to be: the quality of actual children's lives" (p. 4). As is evident in the work by Vivian Paley (1997) and other childhood researchers (González et al., 2005), children may be actively involved in shaping the classroom community and the curriculum through their relationships with one another, with their families, and with the teacher. It is established in current childhood theories that recognizing the agency of children means researchers must consider children as competent and capable of participating and expressing their points of view.

In this chapter, I have described my research process and methods for working with children and teachers in the classrooms. I negotiated many different roles in the context of my research study and with the all those who I encountered while in the field site. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note working with others in inquiry involves learning to live in the midst of stories,

We come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue. Furthermore, the places in which they live and work, their classrooms, their schools, their communities, are also in the midst when we researchers arrive. (pp. 63-64)

In the next chapter, I will explore the data analysis related to the children's creative responses to visual literature.

ALL MY IDEAS FLOW: CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO PICTURE BOOKS

Imagination opens up new worlds, discloses new vistas, and makes life enjoyable.

Mulcahey, 2009, p. 7

In this chapter, I focus on listening to children's responses, in word and image, to contemporary picture books. Drawing on work in childhood and literacy studies, this chapter is centred on the children themselves. I focus on the ways that the children listen to and engage with selected contemporary Canadian picture books in French classrooms. In this chapter, the children's responses to contemporary visual literature provide 'snapshots' (Kendrick & McKay, 2004) that afford insight into their literacy experiences. Central to my analysis of the children's engagements with visual literature is the notion that "symbol systems other than language are not 'tack-ons' but rather relevant options for creating and expressing meaning" (Kendrick & McKay, 2009, p. 54). Following from Mulcahey (2009), I am interested in the wonder that children experience through engagements with visual literature, and how these are related to their own lives.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter is organized into three sections according to the thematic categories relating to the children's responses to literature. I begin this chapter with a description of the categories that have emerged from my qualitative data analysis, each of which is presented in the chart in the next section. I then discuss the role of stories in contributing to imaginative responses and how this is connected to children's aesthetic, social, and emotional experiences. By creating artwork in response to literature and sharing this with friends and teachers, children gained the social experience of learning from one another while also expanding their perspectives (Greene, 1995). Personal experiences emerged both through the oral and visual responses as children talked about, painted, and drew pictures following the shared read-alouds. In the second section of the chapter, I focus on the children's experiences of creating art and how the books cultivated an aesthetic engagement and interest in exploring the wonder of colour and themes through visual art. Finally, I argue that through deep engagements with visual literature, children developed compassion and empathy as they related to the experiences of the characters in the books. Experiencing books over time contributed to the satisfaction and pleasure of reading words and images. I draw on Paley's (1997) notion of 'narrative continuity' to illustrate how the children became familiar with the stories and characters, cultivating enjoyment with the visual texts and confidence among the children as readers and producers of texts. My interpretations of the literacy events in the classrooms and children's responses to contemporary Canadian literature are documented in this chapter.

ALL MY IDEAS FLOW: CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES

As described in Chapter Four on **Doing Field Work**, I have analyzed my data according to the emerging themes in relation to my research question. The following table outlines the rules of inclusion for each of the categories related to the overall theme of the Chapter **All My Ideas Flow**, which is centered on children's responses to visual literature. This theme includes three main categories:

1. Responding to literature by using imagination
2. Creating with my hands, and
3. Exploring complexity.

CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES	RULE OF INCLUSION
<p><i>Responding to literature by using imagination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to stories • Exploring emotions • Imagining the story • Making personal connections and connections to the ‘other’ 	<p>This category refers to children’s aesthetic experiences of listening to picture books read aloud and the ways that hearing and viewing stories cultivates their imagination. This includes the way that children explore emotions through interactions with literature and in their responses. Children’s aesthetic responses to the visual and poetic languages of literature enabled them to imagine new possibilities and to connect with others through shared interests while also gaining a deeper understanding of their own lived experiences.</p>
<p><i>Creating with my hands</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Painting is an activity with your hands • It feels like I’m free • All of these colours together 	<p>This category reflects the children’s embodied and sensory experience of using visual modes of communicating and producing meaning in response to literature. The children emphasized the agency, freedom, and autonomy they experienced in having the opportunity to use visual art media to draw, paint, and create visual responses to contemporary children’s literature.</p>
<p><i>Exploring complexity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to characters • Compassion for characters’ experiences • Noticing visual details 	<p>This category refers to children reflecting on picture books, asking questions, and exploring the complex issues in the stories. Through the shared experience of engaging with contemporary literature, children became familiar with stories, relating to characters, interpreting themes, and cultivating an appreciation for the complexity of picture books. A key aspect of exploring complexity is the attention to the details in the illustrations.</p>

Table 10. All my ideas flow: Rules of inclusion.

SELECTED PICTURE BOOKS: *LES ENFANTS QUI PARLENT AUX ENFANTS*

The selected Canadian picture books for the study included: *Fourchon* (Maclear, 2011), *Virginia Wolf* (Maclear, 2012), *Je suis fou de Vava* (Laferrière, 2006), *Le baiser mauve de Vava* (Laferrière, 2014), *La fête des morts* (Laferrière, 2009), and *Le kimono de Suki* (Uegaki, 2001). As mentioned in Chapter Four, these texts were selected in collaboration with the participating teachers as the books are written from a child's perspective and address topics relevant to children's lives. I have described the books and selection process in Chapter Four. The stories are related to the theme *les enfants qui parlent aux enfants* (children speaking with children). It is noteworthy that each of the picture books are illustrated by Québec visual artists: Isabelle Arsenault illustrated both *Virginia Wolf* and *Fourchon*, Stéphane Jorisch illustrated *Le kimono de Suki*, Frédéric Normandin illustrated the Laferrière trilogy.

Fourchon is a story about the child of a spoon and a fork, Fourchon (Spork), who feels out of place in the kitchen, as he looks different from all the others. He tries to fit in by wearing a pointy hat to be like the forks and then round hat to be like the spoons, but he is laughed at and bullied. Finally, Fourchon finds a place where he can be himself and is appreciated for who he is.

Virginia Wolf is a story that addresses the themes of mental health and compassion. Virginia wakes in a wolfish mood and her whole house is turned upside down. Her sister Vanessa tries to cheer her up to no avail, until Virginia finally announces that she would feel happier if she could go to Bloomsberry. Unable to locate it in the atlas, Vanessa decides to paint the garden on the bedroom wall. When Virginia wakes up and sees the drawing, she starts to join in designing the colourful scene, cutting out purple paper butterflies and turquoise birds along with her sister. Things go back to normal in the house, where everything had been upside down, and Virginia transforms into a girl. Maclear has captured the feelings of sadness and how one's mood and perspective can change through the love and care of another person. The two sisters finally go to play amidst the butterflies and rabbits in the meadow of Bloomsberry.

In the trilogy by Dany Laferrière, *Je suis fou de Vava*, *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, and *La fête des morts*, the reader is transported to Haiti through the words and images. The author narrates his childhood memories of living with his grandmother in Petit-Goâve. In *Je suis fou de Vava*, Vieux-Os

is in love with a girl named Vava who lives in his village. The story is told in the form of a letter to the reader in which the author describes the summer from the perspective of a ten-year old. In *La fête des morts*, Vieux-Os learns about the Haitian traditions of celebrating and remembering loved ones who have passed away. His grandmother teaches him the importance of always remembering the names of loved ones to keep their memory alive. *Le baiser mauve de Vava* describes the experiences of the young boy during the time of the dictatorship in Haiti, when the village is under repressive military control. Vieux-Os is concerned about his friend Vava who is very sick. Furthermore, his grandmother is worried for his safety in Petit-Goâve and he learns that he must leave the village to go live with his mother. Vieux-Os realizes that writing poetry is a way to express his thoughts and feelings.

Le kimono de Suki is set in contemporary Canadian city⁷, where Suki lives with her two sisters and her mother. Over the summer, Suki enjoyed spending time at the Japanese festival with her grandmother visiting from Japan. She was proud to wear her kimono to the first day of Grade One. Suki's sisters and her friends laugh at her for wearing something different, until she is encouraged by her teacher to talk to the class about her dress. Suki takes the opportunity to share her connection to her grandmother and the joys of dancing to the beat of the taiko drums at the festival. The story has a powerful message for children about finding one's inner strength through connecting to family and cultural heritage.

There are common themes among these picture books such as family, love, identity, belonging, and community. In this chapter, I will describe how the children responded as they listened to stories about Fourchon finding his sense of place in the kitchen, Vieux-Os expressing his love for Vava and having deep conversations with his grandmother, and Suki who dances to the rhythm of the taiko drums. The stories evoked powerful responses in the classroom.

⁷ The city in the book is not mentioned, although when I attended a presentation by the author during a public children's literature event of the Canadian Children's Book Week 2015 in Montréal, I learned from Japanese Canadian author Chieri Uegaki that the book is based on her own childhood memories of attending the Japanese Matsuri summer festival in Vancouver, British Columbia.

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE BY USING IMAGINATION

This category is focused on the children's imaginative responses to literature. Listening to the stories being read aloud sparked the children's creativity and imagination, as they were inspired to create their own works of art. For the children, listening to stories was an aesthetic, affective, and social experience as they were engaged with the illustrations and the narrative text (Greene, 1995). Through my conversations with children and observations in the classrooms, the children showed me how reading literature and taking part in extended literacy activities allowed the space to imagine and connect with the stories. When the time is created for children to interact with stories by taking part in open-ended discussions in the classroom, drawing or writing their responses, and sharing their responses with others, new creative possibilities emerge. Such experiences fostered joy and passion for reading picture books and for engaging with visual arts.

By listening to the voices of the children and their responses in word and image, in this chapter I attempt to illustrate the ways in which children's imaginative thought can be ignited through stories. The significance of having the space and freedom to imagine is critical in the context of increasingly diverse classrooms in Montréal, as in many other contexts around the world, where we must imagine new ways of being together (Chambers, 2003; Greene, 1995; Smits & Naqvi, 2014).

LISTENING TO STORIES

Listening to stories relates to children's use of imagination and is an aesthetic experience. Art educator Mulcahey (2009) notes that an aesthetic experience "is the result of being deeply affected by sensory perception, which in the long run increases our cognitive abilities" (p. 10; see also Greene, 1995). In the following examples, I describe how some of the children's responses illustrate their aesthetic engagement with listening to and responding to stories.

Heather: Nicolas, how do you like when your teacher reads the stories?

Nicolas: Well, it lets all the ideas flow.

Heather: Oh, my goodness.

Nicolas: It makes me so creative. It makes me imagine some beautiful music in my head and just imagine what it would look like when I draw it. Like you know how that painter cut off his ear, but...

Heather: Van Gogh?

Nicolas: Yeah. He drew putting music on. He just coloured...

Heather: He was very talented.

Nicolas: Like you know, we just close our eyes and imagine music the pictures come and it flows.

Heather: Yes.

Nicolas: It flows. All the ideas flow in your head.

Focus group, June 11, 2014

Nicolas' description of the way that his ideas flow when he imagines music while hearing stories and drawing points to the multisensory and multimodal potential for engaging young readers with literary response by drawing on their interests. As Nicolas described himself listening to the story and then imagining music when he draws, I was reminded of when the children listened to and viewed the short book trailer of *Virginia Wolf* before painting their own vision of an imaginary place that would make them happy. The book trailer is a short videoclip produced by Kyo Maclear and Isabelle Arsenault; the trailer features music, images, and a narrator speaking from the perspective of the child in the book. The music accompanying the trailer is a gentle folk song, *If It Rains*, by Canadian singer Basia Bulat. The book trailer explores the theme of the text with tips on what to do when one encounters a wolfish mood (feeling sad). This book trailer is a live animation of the storybook, with clips showing the illustrator drawing on paper. We presented the book trailer before asking the Grade Two children to think about a place that they would paint.

We displayed one of the images from the same book on the Smartboard in the classroom:

the last page with the two sisters walking outside to play in the garden of Bloomsberry. When Madame Lili encouraged the class to look at what they could see and describe in French in the image, some of the children noted “*les fleurs*”, “*les oiseaux*”, “*les lapins*”. We invited the class to think and paint a place that would make them happy. They painted at five tables in the classroom, with a variety of colours, water, and large white paper set at each table.

In the story, Virginia told her sister about how she would like to fly away to another place to feel better. Vanessa narrates the story in the following excerpt from the book,

<i>SI JE VOLAIS, JE CROIS QUE ÇA ME FERAIT DU BIEN.</i>	<i>IF I WERE FLYING RIGHT NOW I MIGHT FEEL BETTER</i>
« <i>Si tu volais, où aimerais tu-aller?</i> »	“If you were flying, where would you like to go?”
<i>J’ai ouvert son atlas et j’ai nommé des endroits.</i>	I opened here atlas and named a few places.
« <i>Paris. Tokyo. México.—</i> »	“Paris. Tokyo. Mexico City.—”
« <i>NON. NON. NON.</i> » <i>Dit Virginia</i>	“NO. NO. NO!” she said.
« <i>SI JE VOLAIS, J’TRAIS LÀ OÙ TOUT EST PARFAIT. UN ENDROIT PLEIN DE GATEAUX GLACÉS ET DE FLEURS EXQUISES ET FORMIDABLES ARBRES À GRIMPER ET ABSOLUMENT AUCUN TRACAS.</i> »	“IF I WERE FLYING, I WOULD TRAVEL TO A PERFECT PLACE. A PLACE WITH FROSTED CAKES AND BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS AND EXCELLENT TREES TO CLIMB AND ABSOLUTELY NO DOLDRUMS.”
« <i>Où est cet endroit?</i> » <i>ai-je demandé.</i>	“Where is that?” I asked.
<i>Elle a réfléchi un peu puis a dit</i> « <i>BLOOMSBERRY, LE PAYS DES FLEURS AUX FRUITS</i> »	She thought for a moment and said, “BLOOMSBERRY OF COURSE.”
« <i>Bloomsberry? Connais pas. C’est près de Boston?</i> »	“Bloomsberry? Never heard of it. Is that near Burlington?”
<i>Virginia a secoué la tête en soupirant.</i> « <i>Bristol?</i> »	She shook her head and sighed. “Buffalo?” I said.
« <i>JE NE PENSE PAS</i> » <i>a-t-elle grogné en se glissant sous les draps.</i>	“I DON’T THINK SO,” she growled, slipping under the covers.

Maclear, 2012

When Vanessa searches in the atlas, but does not find this place called Bloomsberry, she creates it with her own art box, drawing on the wall in Virginia's bedroom. After listening to the story and thinking about where they would fly to if they were feeling wolfish, and to draw or paint that scene, the children's ideas flowed freely.

Watching the book trailer for *Virginia Wolf*, a short video based on the story, added to the children's engagement with the text. This allowed for their ideas to flow after listening to the stories. Their own interests and passions appeared in their artwork. For instance, Arjunu's enthusiasm for his idea of painting a motorcycle made him light up with energy as he concentrated on his work. When Arjunu reflected on his painting of the motorcycle he told me that his friend Nicolas had helped him with the drawing while he had painted (Focus group, June 18, 2014). The production of the image therefore involved a sharing of his passion with his peers, as they worked together and talked while they painted.



Figure 6. Arjunu's painting of a motorcycle.

Children's visual responses to the same book, *Virginia Wolf*, showed variety in the children's interpretation and meaning making of all of their ideas flowing. The children's visual images demonstrated the power of listening to and viewing visual literature to provoke creative thought. Osman expressed himself in response to the literature and book trailer both with the movements of his paintbrush to produce meaning on his paper, and through his facial expressions, as he appeared to be enjoying the process by smiling and connecting to those around him. In Osman's painting below, he depicts a variety of umbrellas of different colours.

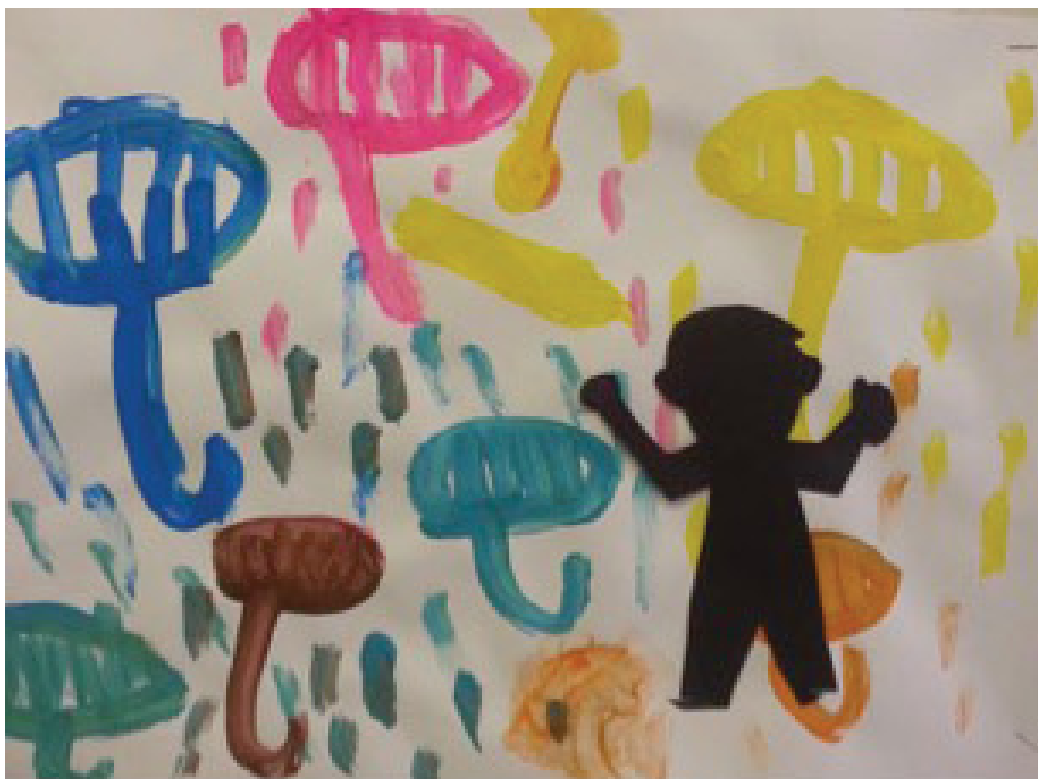


Figure 7. Osman's painting of umbrellas.

When the children in Madame Lili's Grade Two class watched the book trailer *Virginia Wolf*, I noticed that Jalindu smiled and let out a sigh when she saw the words LOVE, LOVE, LOVE appear in the video. Her response to the theme of this story showed me that she was listening attentively and experiencing the text aesthetically. Later, in the June focus group, I asked Jalindu and her peers about how they felt when listening to the stories we read and viewed,

- Heather:** Did you notice anything different about these books from books you usually read in your classroom? How was it listening to your teacher and me read these stories?
- Jalindu:** It was like a calm.
- Heather:** Calm, it was calm.
- Jalindu:** It was like taking a rest.

Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014

For Jalindu, Nicholas, Arjunu, and Osman, listening to stories opened up new spaces for dreaming, imagining, and being together. When Jalindu mentioned that listening to the stories made her feel calm, Nicholas said that it made him feel creative, and when I saw Ngozi find her voice as she listened to stories, I am reminded of the power of literature to engage children in dreaming and deciding about “where they want to go” (Myers, 2014, p. 8). This study explored their engagements with contemporary texts by Canadian authors written from diverse perspectives. Nicholas especially developed an interest in Dany Laferrière’s story *Je suis fou de Vava*, which he described as the “*most creative*” book (Focus group, June 2014). Thus, new voices were introduced in the classroom through the selected literature. For in order to dream, and think about the possibilities available in life, having access to a rich variety of stories and critical literature is necessary in order to develop an imagination and a nuanced understanding of the world (Barry, 2014; Maclear, 2016). Mulcahey maintains that imagination is an important part of thinking and looking at the world from new perspectives: “Many of us may think that imagination is just dreaming up fantasies or false hopes. But with imagination come wonder, invention, and discoveries, not just in art, but also in life” (Mulcahey, 2009, p. 7).

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

The wide range of emotions present in the stories evoked a myriad of responses from the children as they discussed and painted their own interpretations of feelings such as happiness, sadness, and fear.

In response to *Virginia Woolf*, Ngozi painted a scene of herself as an imagined animal swimming at the beach. Playing outside in nature was a theme in the story of Virginia Woolf, as the two sisters went to the garden filled with flowers, rabbits, and butterflies. Ngozi represented her own interest and intention in her work (Mavers, 2011). When I asked her about the meaning of her painting in an informal classroom conversation, she told me, “*When I’m sad, I go to the beach. I jump in the water!*” (Fieldnotes, May 8, 2014).

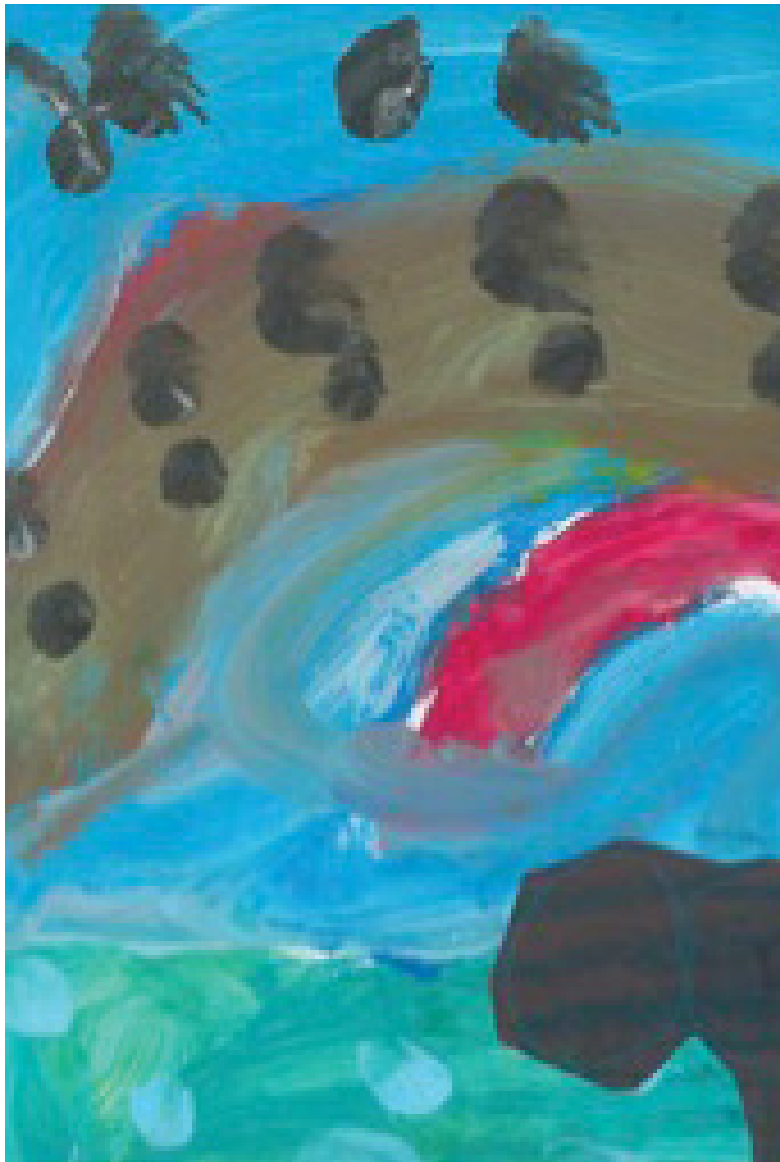


Figure 8. Ngozi’s painting of the beach.

In response to the same book, Marisol, in Grade Two, painted a picture of a rabbit in the garden. The rabbit had tears flowing down her cheeks. Marisol was very reflective and attentive while she painted. Her attention to the facial expressions and emotions in her visual image in response to story's theme of how to overcome sadness is an indication of Marisol's ability to interpret the feelings of the characters in the book *Virginia Wolf*. It is important to note that this painting was produced after we had first read and discussed the story and then revisited the text and images by watching the book trailer one week later.

In a small group in the conference room, the children were very focused on mixing colours, and adding details to their work that they had started in the morning. Arjunu worked on his motorcycle and Marisol painted her rabbit. Once Arjunu was satisfied with his motorcycle, he began another painting of a black car with orange glitter paint. Marisol looked over at Arjunu's painting and exclaimed, 'That is SO artistic!' She was happily mixing paint and asked if anyone would like to use the light pink she had made. 'My friends say that I am artistic,' she tells me while she calmly makes gentle strokes with her paintbrush. (Fieldnotes, April 30, 2014)



Figure 9. Marisol's painting of a rabbit (*Virginia Wolf*).

Many of the children, such as Marisol, Arjuna, and Nicolas, showed a high level of joy in listening to the stories. As Nicolas stated, “it makes all of my ideas flow” to describe his enthusiasm for having time to create visual art in response to literature. Nicolas’ creativity is evident as he told me about the inner world of his drawing with pastels in response to *Je suis fou de Vava* in which he depicted the boy on the balcony with the monsters (see Figure 23). He was specific about how he imagined one of the monsters to be less frightening than the others who were terrifying. Nicolas’ description of both his creativity in listening to stories and then responding visually reminds me of the notion that children learn the power of art and drawing, and words, through their experiences with texts. They also have a desire to create their individual responses, to be strong poets (Ng-A-Fook, 2016; Ng-A-Fook, Ibrahim & Reis, 2016; Rorty, 1989).

Heather:	<i>Qu’est-ce que tu dessines?</i>	Tell me about your drawing.
Nicolas:	<i>C’est un garçon qui va dans la chambre avec tous les monstres.</i>	It’s a boy who goes into a room with all the monsters.
Heather:	<i>Sur la galerie. Comment sont les monstres?</i>	On the verandah. What are the monsters like?
Nicolas:	<i>Lui, il ne fait pas vraiment peur. Comme lui, il ne fait pas peur. Mais tous les autres!!</i>	Well, this one’s not really scary. Like him, he’s not frightening at all. But ALL of the others!!

Literacy activity, Grade Two classroom, May 7, 2014)

The poetic language of the visual text, with rich verbal language combined with the aesthetics of the visual images, offered the children an experience of listening to and seeing “strong poets” (Rorty, 1989; see also Ng-A-Fook, 2016; Ng-A-Fook et al., 2016). Drawing on author Genet’s words, “My heart awoke and at once my body thawed,” Lewkovich describes “the introduction of passion, as an irrepressible explosion of the waking heart...that “opens us up to the world of shared experience, where we can’t help but be affected; by others, by language, by beauty, by poetry” (Lewkovich, 2016, p. 162). As described above, Nicolas and Marisol showed how the beauty of the literature moved them to create their own works of art with passion. They have interpreted the mood and body language of the characters in the story and created their own visual

representations. This is consistent with Rabey's (2003) finding with young children reading Anthony Browne's *Zoo* and how they were able to draw the complex facial expressions and body language of protagonists after revisiting the text.

IMAGINING THE STORY

Lerona: I liked doing the project where we are drawing Suki...and imagine...imagining. I imagined when I would be doing that.

Heather: If you were Suki's sister, or if you were in the book?

Lerona: I was in the book.

Focus group, June 11, 2014

Lerona, a Grade Two student, had recently moved to Montréal with her family from Germany, arriving at the school shortly before I began the research project. She engaged thoughtfully with the stories we read and was eager to share her responses. For Lerona, drawing enabled her to imagine being a part of the story. In her painting below, she depicts Suki with her two sisters. Her painting shows the sisters dancing along with Suki, which is an extension of the text that she has imagined. In the story, Suki's sisters are embarrassed to be seen with her wearing a kimono to school. And yet, in this painting, they are dancing with her. Lerona's comments in the focus group revealed that she was thinking about how she could be a part of the story itself.⁸

Heather: Lerona, how do you like it when your teacher reads the stories?

Lerona: I imagine that place. And I imagine that I'm the character in that story. And then I get more ideas. And, I like it.

Heather: Which character did you imagine?

Lerona: I imagine that I was the sister of Suki.

Heather: Ah, the sister of Suki.

Lerona: And I was, but the **nice** sister, not like...

⁸ Throughout this chapter, emphasis added is indicated by bolded words.

- Heather:** So you would be the nice sister to Suki?
- Lerona:** Yes.
- Heather:** What would you tell her when she wanted to wear her kimono?
- Lerona:** I would tell her I'd like to wear it too.

Focus group, June 11, 2014



Figure 10. Lerona's painting of Suki dancing in her kimono.

By having conversations about the stories and the issues in the texts, the children showed an interest in contributing their own ideas to the narratives. For example, in Grade One, the children considered alternative endings of the story *Le baiser mauve de Vava*. In response to this story, their teacher Madame Lili asked them their opinion on whether or not they liked the ending of the story. In the activity, if they liked the ending they could illustrate it. If they did not like the ending, they could imagine a new one and recreate the story. There was a variety of responses among the children, both those who did like the ending for various reasons or those who did not. The examples below, by Chen, a boy in Grade One, and Deepa, a girl in Grade One, show

their imaginative responses to the story. Chen stated that he did not like the ending because the boy in the text had to leave (Vieux-Os was sent away from his village and had to leave behind his grandmother, his friends including Vava, and his beloved dog). As a new ending to the story, Chen drew a picture of Vieux-Os and Vava, and two other friends, flying among the stars in the night sky. Deepa, on the other hand, stated that she did like the ending. She wrote, “*Oui, parce que Vava donne les bisous de papillon,*” and she draws Vava looking out of her window and saying goodbye to Vieux-Os. The young boy is being driven away in a van, and she includes a text bubble with the words “Bye-bye” as he is saying goodbye to Vava. Both Chen and Deepa, in imagining new endings to the story have focused on visualizing and recreating the ending of the story, which reveals their understanding of the theme of separation and how saying farewell can be difficult.

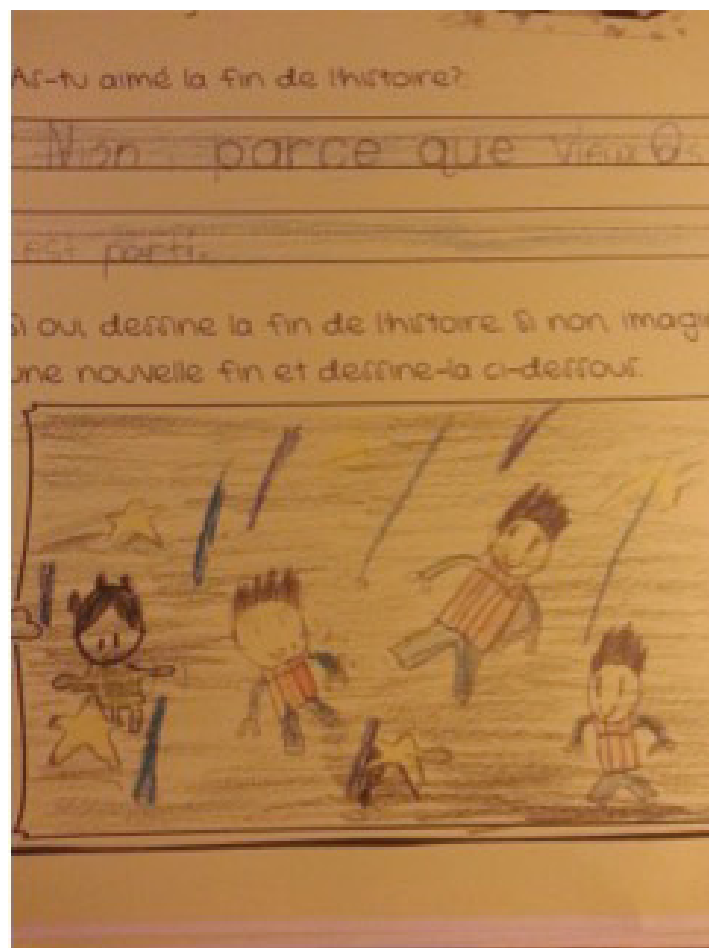


Figure 11. Chen's story ending for *Le baiser mauve de Vava*.

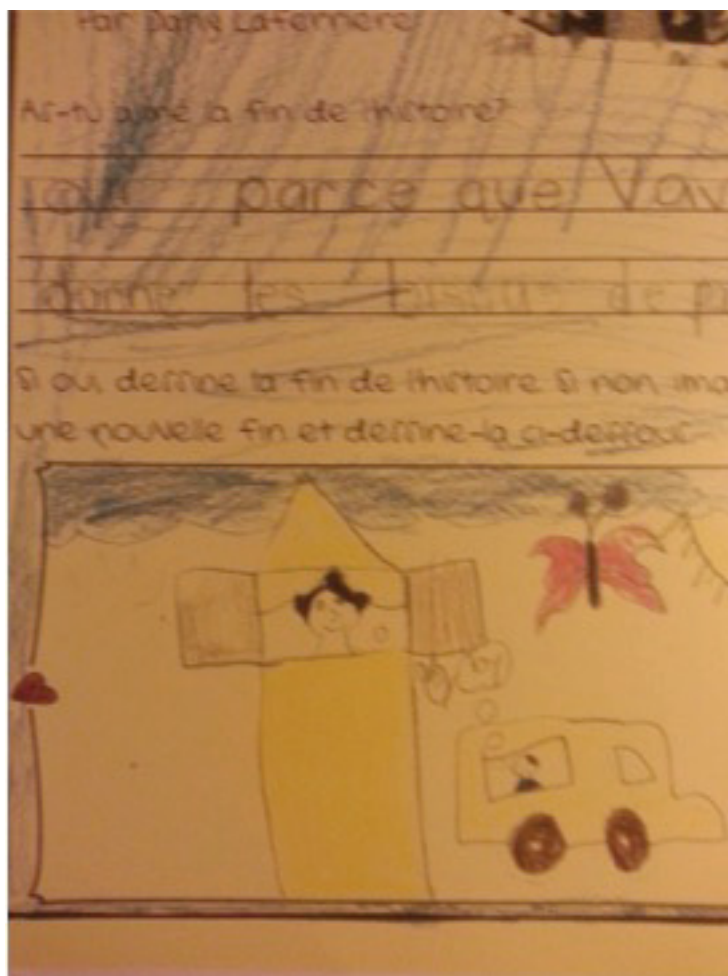


Figure 12. Deepa's story ending for *Le baiser mauve de Vava*.

In a literature response activity in the Grade One class, Hope drew Vanessa as the main character and then drew a small picture of herself in bed when she feels like a wolf (*un loup*). Then she wrote,

Si je volais, j'aimerais aller en Jamaïque. If I could fly, I would like to fly to Jamaica.

The following week, Hope painted her image of herself in Jamaica (see Figure 13). In the next section, I will describe more of our conversations about personal experience that emerged throughout the literacy project.

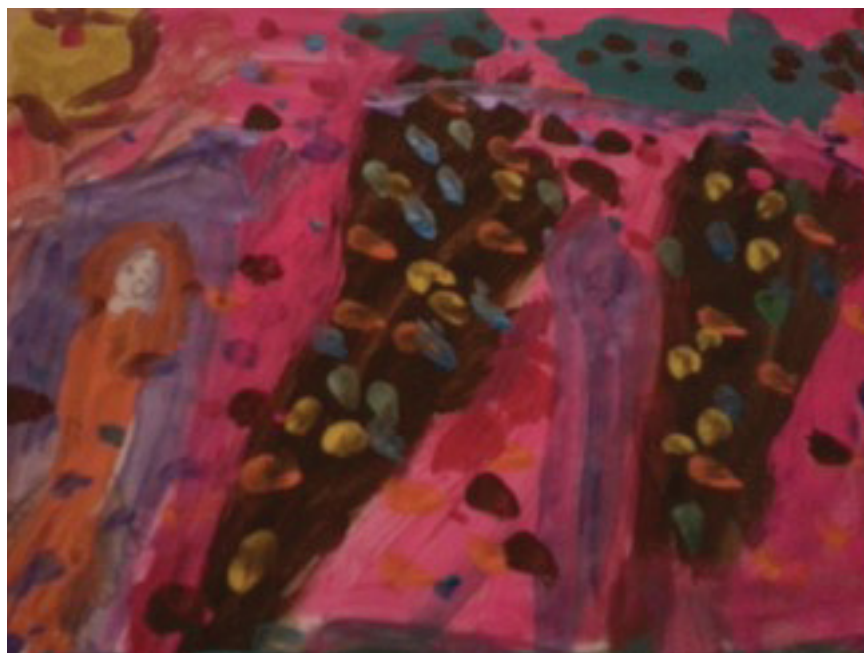


Figure 13. Hope's painting of Jamaica.

MAKING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS AND CONNECTING TO THE 'OTHER'

Children's personal experiences and interests were expressed in different ways as they discussed topics such as family, siblings, place, cultural heritage, language, and hobbies. In response to the story *Je suis fou de Vava*, Hope asked me if she could paint a picture of herself reading with her older sister (see Figure 14). This painting illustrates Hope's interest in reading, as well as her relationship with her sister; she has portrayed herself smiling while her sister reads to her. Hope also shows an understanding of her home literacy practices, and makes a personal connection between the reading that we did together in the classroom to the reading that she does at home. When she showed me the painting, she said that the yellow book was the same book that we had read in French (*Je suis fou de Vava*), but her sister was reading in English. Her response also showed her awareness of reading in different languages: French at school and English at home. Later on, she changed her mind and told me that her sister was actually reading a Robert Munsch book. Hope's response in thinking about and talking about her painting shows her own reflection on the books that she liked to read, and Robert Munsch was among the authors familiar to the children in Grade One. By pointing

out that it was a Robert Munsch text that she was reading in her painting, Hope was also making a distinction between the types of stories that she was used to reading and those that were less familiar, such as *Je suis fou de Vava*, that we read during the project.

By listening to and viewing Hope's response, we can see how this sheds light on her own experiences and interests with literacy, and how she makes a connection between reading at school and home.



Figure 14. Hope's painting of reading with her big sister.

As I worked with Hope and Yasmin, in Grade One, the conversation that emerged through their interactions with one another, with me, and with their artwork led to a deeper understanding of their personal experiences and interests. By looking at and sharing their artwork with one another and with me (Figure 15 and Figure 16), they reflected on play, place, and identity.

Yasmin: I went to the beach...to play.

Heather: Where was the beach you went to?

Hope: Florida, was it in Florida?

Heather: Was it in Montréal?

Yasmin: Montréal.

Heather: What did you play at the beach?

Hope: Where are you from?

Yasmin: Pakistan.

Heather: Pakistan. Did you go to a beach there?

Yasmin: Yes.

Heather: I've never been there. What did you see at the beach in Pakistan?

Hope: She went to Pakistan!

Heather: That's so nice. I would like to go.

Hope: I never went to Jamaica. I'm going with my mom.

Hope: Are you gonna go to Jamaica?

Heather: I hope so. One day. And I'd like to go to Pakistan.

Hope: You could probably go at the same day as me.

Heather: Oh, that would be great...

Hope: **But, where are you from?**

Heather: I'm from British Columbia.

Hope: Oh. My mom's dad, he's from Jamaica. He's all Jamaica, he's all Jamaican. But I'm not Jamaican. I have blood in me. And I have Trini blood in me. My mom's mom, she's Trini.

Heather: Trini.

Classroom literacy activity, May 7, 2014

Both Yasmin and Hope shared their personal experiences with one another, and with me, as we discussed places where we lived and had visited (or would like to visit one day). As this conversation began by a response to the story *Je suis fou de Vava*, it led us to talk about our own lived experiences based on the drawings that the girls had made. When Yasmin spoke further about her picture of the beach, and how she herself had been under the water, it enabled both Hope and I to understand more about Yasmin's experiences and interests.

Yasmin: I went under. [*Looking at her picture of the ocean*]

Heather: Under the water? What was it like under the water?

Yasmin: I went under.

Heather: Under the water. What do you see under the water?

Hope: Fish? Fishes? Pink fish?

Yasmin: No. [*Pause*]. Diamonds!

Heather: Diamonds! What did it feel like to swim under the water?

Hope: Yes.

Yasmin: Sa...[*Speaking softly*]

Heather: Salt? It tasted like salt?

Yasmin: **Soft!**

Heather: Oh, soft.

Hope: **The water always is soft.**

Heather: I love being in water.

Hope: You can't even feel it. It just goes away. You can't feel it. You can feel paper.

Heather: Do you like to swim? Are you a good swimmer?

Yasmin: Yeah.

Hope: Yes!

Classroom literacy activity, May 7, 2014?



Figure 15. Yasmin's drawing of a beach (*Je suis fou de Vava*).

This activity took place in this classroom right before the lunch recess, and Hope and Yasmin invited me to go out to the playground to play with them, where our conversation continued. As Malchiodi (1998) observes, “many different aspects of growth (that) are linked to art expression, including cognitive abilities, emotional development, interpersonal skills, and developmental maturity” (p. 37). For Hope and Yasmin, engaging in art and conversation was a way to build interpersonal skills in a safe and friendly space. By gaining a deeper understanding of one another’s personal experiences and interests, the children, such as Yasmin and Hope, also developed their friendship circles.

When I read *Le kimono de Suki* in the Grade Two class, I asked the children about special activities they did with their grandparents. Suki, in the story, had fond memories of dancing to the Taiko drums with her grandmother at the Japanese festival in the summertime. After listening to this story, Paul decided to paint himself with his grandmother in China.

During a small group activity in April, Paul had announced that he would be going away on a trip to China with his mother, on a visit to his grandmother. He would be missing about three weeks of school. I asked him if he would like to take a sketch book with him to draw pictures on his trip. At first he did not seem interested, but when he saw that I had a bright blue sketchbook with a green lizard on the cover, he changed his mind and asked to take the book on his trip. His teacher, Madame Lili, thought it was a great idea and she made him a nametag for the sketch book. A few weeks later, when he came back, he brought in the journal. His friend Sarah ran up to tell me as soon as I walked into the classroom that day: *'Miss Heather, Paul brought back his book!'* When we had time to look at it together that day, he explained the pictures to me and some of his friends gathered around as well to see the pictures in his sketch book. Most of the pictures were of the different planes and airports that he travelled on and through along his journey across Canada and to China.



Figure 16. Paul's trip to Xiangyang, China.



Figure 17. Paul's painting-shopping with grandma in Xianyang, China.

Paul explained that in his painting, in response to *Le kimono de Suki*, he was helping his grandmother with shopping. They were at a store in China, and he used Chinese characters to write the name Big King on the shopping bag. He also pointed out that his grandmother had a cane. The painting, and his description, shows Paul's representation of his strong connection with his grandmother, his cultural experience of being in China, and his linguistic knowledge of the language, much like the way that the young girl, Suki, in *Le kimono de Suki*, gained pride in sharing her stories with her class of being with her grandmother who visited from Japan.

Rukshana was excited when her teacher Madame Lili read the book *Le baiser mauve de Vava* to her Grade Two class and invited the students to compose a poem together with some of the words from the book. Rukshana's family is from Pakistan and her father is a poet who writes in Urdu. The teacher placed several key words from the poem in a box, drawing two words from a box and asked the children to think about how they could put those words together as one line in a poem. The poem was written collaboratively as a class, and then each student added a few words individually

and illustrated their page. These pages were eventually compiled in a class book for each Grade Two class, and we also made copies for the school principal. While I worked with a group of girls in the classroom, Rukshana proudly told us about her father being a poet and writing poetry in Urdu. Her prior experience with poetry at home clearly had an impact on her interest in reading and writing poetry in the classroom. Rukshana also showed an appreciation for representation of the feelings of the characters in the images and in the words of the text. She described her interest in how the girl, Vava, was able to heal and recover from her illness, and the way that the boy expressed his feelings and concern for Vava through poetry. Rukshana revisited this story in our conversation in the library in June, slowly flipping through the pages and reading an excerpt aloud in French.

- Rukhsana:** I liked the book *Le baiser mauve de Vava*. I liked it because I liked the story where Vava was sick and just by one kiss, she got ALL better. And I liked the part where at the end the boy was leaving and he saw Vava happy. And I like the part where he, what do you say—kind of he made like poems of Vava. And I like the way he said that she has all butterflies whenever she comes over here. [Reading aloud] ‘*Vava tes joues sont chaudes, ta langue est sèche, tes yeux sont*’...*c’est quoi ça?* (‘Vava your cheeks are hot, your tongue is dry, your eyes are’...what is that?)
- Heather:** ‘*tes yeux sont plein de fièvre*’.
Your eyes are feverish
- Rukhsana:** ‘*Et mon coeur pleure pour toi*’. *J’aime ce poème beaucoup*.
‘And my heart cries for you.’ I like this poem a lot.

Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014

Rukshana took pleasure in reading the poetic words in French, her third language. Having multiple opportunities to interact with the picture book fostered a deeper personal engagement with the text. Furthermore, by sharing her love of poetry, by telling us about the poems that her father writes in Urdu, Rukshana was able to make a connection between her home and school worlds, something that is highlighted in the work of Dyson (2001), Moll et al. (1992), and Taylor et al. (2008), teaching me and her friends some words in Urdu and sharing some of the poems that she had learned and created at home. During our conversation in the library, Rukshana spontaneously shared one of her poems that she translated from Urdu. She inspired her friend Elizabeth to share a poem as well.

Heather: I think it's (Urdu) a beautiful language and there's a lot of poetry (in Urdu).

Rukhsana: There's like one million poetries!

Heather: A lot of poems.

Rukhsana: Yeah, a lot of people are poems. Are you gonna ask me about my poem?

Heather: About the poem. Did you write some more poems recently?

Yeah, I'll see if I can bring them. I only know some in my language. So my dad's helping me. I made one, but I'll tell you in English.

[She recites the poem in Urdu and in English]

Rukhsana:
*They were good people,
they were good people,
but now they died.
When their coffin went,
they smiled.
People go and people come.
People do not stay in this world.*

I made a little poem. I was in my room. I don't remember all of it, but I remember some of it. I love poems. I made about only three of them. I only remember some parts. Can I say them?

Elizabeth:
*The sky turns blue.
And so is my shoe.
We all breathe,
All underneath.*

I made it when I was four, so I don't really remember it.

Marjeena: Sometimes poems don't always rhyme.

Conversation in library, June 2014

Thompson (2013) writes of how, by researching with young children in a Chicago preschool, she learned that through their drawings, they “explored issues and ideas that are very much on the minds of preschool children everywhere. Families provided endless material for drawings; often families lined up and labeled, but sometimes families at the park or flying to Mexico” (p. 95). The responses of the children demonstrated their interest in drawing, painting and talking about their families, play, and travels to real or imagined destinations. The words and images of Hope, Yasmin, Paul, and Rukshana demonstrated the children's interest in sharing their personal experiences as they

made connections to the picture books. Their visual images are ‘snapshots’ (Kendrick & McKay, 2004) that provide glimpse of their identities and experiences.

CREATING WITH MY HANDS

Through my interactions with the children in the primary classrooms, I observed that there was a focused and uplifting energy among the children and teachers when the classes engaged in artistic responses. For example, when the children were working with plasticine to create invented objects after reading Maclear’s *Fourchon*, I noted that the classroom was a “*calming and happy*” place (Fieldnotes, April 17, 2014). In this section, I describe the ways that children engaged with literature by actively creating with their hands.

PAINTING IS AN ACTIVITY WITH YOUR HANDS

Through creating artistic responses to literature, I observed that children were engaged in the embodied and sensory experience of creating and producing art. Kendrick and McKay (2004) argue that alternative forms of representation such as drawings allow

Young children to represent whole areas of their sensory lives. Like snapshots... pictures capture sensory modes such as sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch in a way that language cannot; they infer the moods, sentiments, relationships and interactions that are embedded and diffused across the many different literacy contexts of children’s lives. (p. 122)

Malchiodi (1998) observes the complexities that are involved in creating art, “a process that brings together many different experiences to create something new, personal and unique” (p. 19). As noted by Kress (2000), multimodality is a way that we use a combination of our senses to make meaning,

Human bodies have a wide means of engagement with the world; a wide and highly varied means of perception. These we call our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, feel. Each is attuned in quite specific way to the natural environment, providing us with highly differentiated information. Of course, none of our senses ever

operates in isolation from the others...(t)hat, from the beginning, guarantees the multimodality of our semiotic world. (p. 184)



Figure 18. Opal's painting in response to Virginia Wolf.

While children painted in response to Maclear's *Virginia Wolf*, I joined Opal and her friends at their table. Opal expressed her enthusiasm for painting as it enabled her to use her hands. She was also aware of her interests in painting, in particular plants and animals.

Opal:

*Moi, j'aime peindre les animaux et les plantes... J'aime faire la peinture parce que c'est comme une activité mais **avec tes mains**. Moi, j'aime faire la peinture parce qu'on a beaucoup de couleurs pour utiliser et ça peut faire comme WOW!*

I like painting animals and plants... I like painting because it's an activity **but with your hands**. I like painting because we have a lot of colours to use and that can make like WOW!

Classroom literacy activity in Grade Two, April 30, 2014

IT FEELS LIKE I'M FREE

Working with visual literature and creating images with various art materials offered children a sense of freedom to explore ideas and find their voice. In a focus group interview with a group of girls in Grade Two, I asked them about their experiences with the stories and responding with art. In their descriptions of producing artwork, the girls describe the process as being one that gives a sense of freedom to create. They also pointed out that having different materials provided an empowering experience.

Heather: If you could tell teachers about what you would like to do more of, what would you like to say? With stories and art.

Elizabeth: I would actually like to do three things. First of all, spelling. Second, math. Third, art.

Heather: Okay, what kind of art?

Elizabeth: I like painting, and I forget what it's called, it's something like this...

Heather: Pastel?

Elizabeth: Yeah, pastel. I love working with pastel and painting. Mostly painting because you can do whatever you want. And pastel.

Heather: So when we were working on this project, with painting and pastel, was that one of your favourite parts?

Elizabeth: Yes, I loved...

Heather: How does it feel?

Elizabeth: It feels kind of like I'm **free**. Like I can do whatever I want. Like no one's the boss of my painting.

Heather: Does anyone else feel like that? Elizabeth said that she feels free.

Sarah: I have four favourites: art, drawing, playdough...and I when I try it, it just makes me happy. It feels like no one can do anything to me. I can do everything myself.

Marjeena: Like **unstoppable**.

Focus group, June 2014

While the girls shared their thoughts on responding to literature through art, we were sitting around a small table in the library. The sun was shining down on us from the skylight above. I had placed a plant with flowers on the centre of the table: a gift for their teacher Madame Lili. The girls were making objects with plasticine. Elizabeth created a scene of two girls (see Figure 5). As our conversation unfolded there was a strong sense of solidarity and friendship among the girls.

Listening to these girls describe their participation in producing texts sheds light on the way that they view themselves as text makers. As they paint and draw, they engage in imagining, creating, and making meaning by representing their ideas in visual art work. As the girls made choices about what they would draw or paint, they developed confidence in their own abilities. The experience of creating art in response to literature provides an opportunity to explore one's own agency. As Sarah noted, "*I can do everything myself.*" Art making is both an individual experience that involves personal choices, and at the same time is a collective experience as the girls worked alongside others.

Art therapist Cindy Malchiodi (1998) argues that various factors contribute to children's drawings, such as the environment, materials, and the relationship between the children and adults. In my work with the children and teachers in the classrooms, I found that having a variety of quality art materials (paper, paints, pencils, pastels, different colours, etc.) impacted the experience and excitement of producing art. As a researcher, I was able to spend time finding and setting up materials. Some of the children asked me where I found certain colours of paint that they had not used before, and a group of Grade Two students even dropped by the classroom at recess, after we painted in response to *Virginia Wolf*, to ask me if I could write down the name of the art supply store where I had found the materials, so they could show their parents. Furthermore, many of the children expressed that they liked to work on art in the library. As mentioned in Chapter Four, many of the Grade Two students joined me in starting an art club at the library in my last few weeks at the school. Mavers (2011) underlines the importance of considering how the environment shapes the choices that children make in producing their creative work,

What and how children draw and write are framed by what is valued, and what is valued in one environment might be denigrated, ignored or reconfigured in another.

This shapes what they are asked, expected or choose to do, how their efforts are received and how their texts are evaluated... even from the youngest age, how children are seen and how they come to see themselves as text makers are formative of their dispositions and identities. (Mavers, 2011, p. 3)

While the Grade Two class worked on creating invented objects with plastecine after reading *Fourchon*, Saayakann said to me, “*Everyone is happy we’re doing this.*” They were working on creating an invention made from two different objects, similar to the way that the main character in *Fourchon* (Spork) is a mix of a spoon and a fork. When I asked Saayakann, “*Why are they happy?*” he said “*They’re proud of themselves.*” (Fieldnotes, April 17, 2015). Saayakann was in the process of creating at the time that I spoke with him, and unfortunately I did not document the final result of his creation. However, his pleasure in using his hands to create was apparent. In my fieldnotes that day, I also noted that Saayakann had actively participated in the read-aloud by responding in French to the teacher’s questions. He noted that the cutlery in the kitchen was playing in “*la vaisselle*” and that the messy thing that appeared at the end of the story was “*un bébé*”. Saayakann’s participation first in listening to the story, and then inventing an object, showed his multimodal ways of learning and interacting with a French story. Saayakann is a speaker of Tamil, English, and French. French is Saayakann’s third language, and he showed great pleasure in participating in both the reading of the text and in the extended activity. Again, this relates to the importance of revisiting picture books to allow for a deeper engagement.

Julian invented a time travel machine in response to the story *Fourchon*, pictured in Figure 19. As the Grade One teacher had asked the class to draw a pencil sketch of their invention that would combine two things (like the objects that *Fourchon* imagined in the book), Julian showed his interest in using words and images to illustrate his ideas. He labelled his picture with words and arrows to show various parts of the machine, including an arrow with the words “Time Travel” pointing to the buttons at the top of the machine. He drew a human on the machine, and wrote the word “person”. He also indicated where there was a gas tank and other parts of the vehicle. Julian’s invention, that he worked on independently, shows his interest and intention (Kress, 1997; Mavericks, 2011) in his

creative work. The model of his machine created with green and white plastecine is a 3D version of his illustrated picture. Julian was so excited to take home his time travel machine that day that he ran to put it in his backpack in a small Ziploc bag provided by his teacher. When I asked him if he wanted to talk about the machine on my recorder, he agreed. In our informal conversation in the classroom, he chose to speak in English as this is the language in which he is most comfortable expressing himself, although he understood my questions in French. His explanation provided me with insight into his thought process and creativity.

- Heather:** Ok. *Qu'est-ce que c'est?* [In the background, there is lots of excitement of children working on their projects and talking to one another and the teacher]
- Julian:** Um, this is my time travelling car airplane. It already could fly, but I combined it with time travel. Someone sits on this little thingy [indicating the top] and press one of the five buttons on the screen... they will... like, for an example, if they pressed ONE MILLION YEARS AGO, then they pressed AWAY WE GO, they go one million years ago.
- Heather:** Ha! Wooow!
- Julian:** But, if they just pressed the AWAY WE GO, they end up in the middle of nowhere. They just end of up in the middle of their home if they press the away we go button.
- Heather:** Okay.
- Julian:** And there's wheels.
- Heather:** *Est-ce que je peux prendre une photo?*
- Julian:** Yeah.
- Heather:** Okay.
- Julian:** You have to take a picture of the inside and the front. [Eagerly directing me]

Classroom literacy activity, Grade One, April 17, 2014

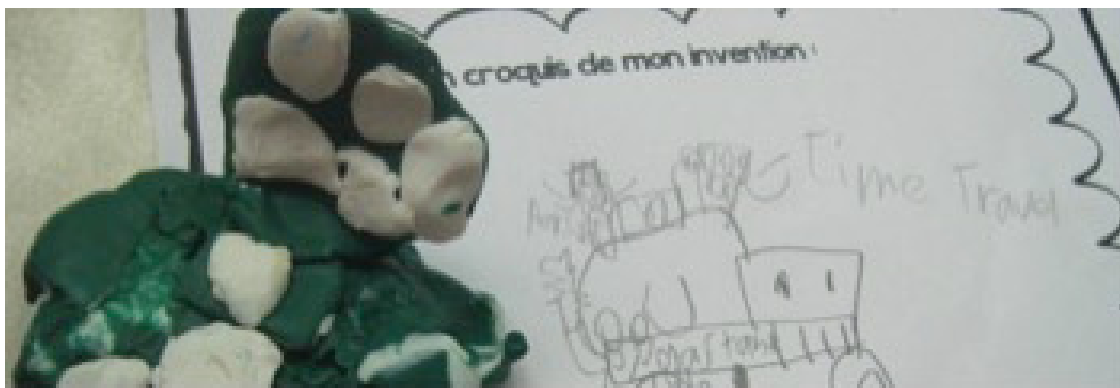


Figure 19. Julian's time traveller.

Julian also further explained that his own desire to travel in time. In an informal conversation at his desk, sitting with a group of his peers, Julian said, *"I would like to time travel to the future when my dad is on the computer to when he is NOT on the computer"* (Fieldnotes, April 17, 2014). As I listened and wrote down what he said in my field notebook, Julian sat up a little taller in his chair and seemed pleased to have his voice heard. Furthermore, his friends who worked alongside him, were also listening and seemed to understand what he meant about wanting to spend time with his father.

Karavai, who worked beside Julian, was also eager to tell me about her invention. In an audio-recorded informal conversation she said, *"This is my machine that blows in to breathe air. And it even has a storm mode. It even does storms and rain?"* (Classroom literacy activity, April 17, 2014). Like Julian, Karavai had a clear idea of what she had created. Her sketch (Figure 20) illustrates the parts of the machine and the wind that is blown out. Later on during the project, Karavai told me that she wanted to be a scientist when she grew up (Group activity in library, June 2014). Through responding to literature in a way that enabled her to invent and create something new from her own imagination, she was able to demonstrate her interest.



Figure 20. Karavai's wind machine.

ALL OF THESE COLOURS TOGETHER: EXPLORING THE WONDER OF COLOUR

A significant aspect of the children's responses to picture books was their explorations of the use of colour to express the feelings, mood, or tone of their images. Vecchi (2010) reflects on the way that children need to have experiences with colour, with the support of their teachers who "let colours express their different identities in complex subjective relationships with children" which involves "being able to understand the poetics of colour and be excited by their evocative, expressive power together with the children" (p. 30). Through their engagements with the visual literature, and in creating their responses, the children showed an interest in exploring the wonder of colours in their various shades and tones,

For a certain shade of yellow changes if the size of the area it covers changes; if an object is rubber or velvet or stain; if a yellow is juxtaposed with a similar shade of colour or with a complementary one; or placed in a particular light...Colours can acquire great power of expression through words or painting; they can be played or danced; palettes with different shades can be made up with powdered colour or materials gathered outdoors as in artisan workshops in past centuries...(p. 30)

While a group of Grade Two students were painting in response to *Virginia Wolf*, Marisol explained that mixing and creating shades of colours was something she enjoyed. As she explained this, Nicolas showed us what colours he could make by mixing paint. As we brought white paint to mix with different colours, the children also explored the ‘value’ of colour by making lighter shades (Rose, 2012).

Heather: *Est-ce que tu aimes faire la peinture?*

Marisol: What?

Nicolas: Do you like painting? [Translating for his friend]

Marisol: Yes.

Heather: *Por qué?*

Marisol: *Me gusta pintar...A mi me gusta pintura por que...por que tienes muchos colores y me gusta crear colores.*

Opal: She says she likes painting because there are a lot of colours and she likes a lot of colours.

Conversation during literacy activity, April 30, 2014

As both the audience of picture books and producers of images, the children showed an awareness of colour in the images and their “semiotic significance” (Sipe, 2008, p. 124). When Marisol described her favourite book, *Virginia Wolf*, she focused on the use of colour in the images as being distinctive and inspiring.

Marisol: I liked...*me gusto Virginia Wolf. Me gusto mucho!* I liked this page. [Opens the book to the page with the hand drawing the flower]. *Sabes asombroso como el se puede dibujar y como el pintar.* Because I like it a lot, because I don’t know how to put *all these colours* together. And then it’s awesome. It’s impressive.

Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014

The use of colour is “a crucial component in an image’s compositionality” (Rose, 2012, p. 59). In discussing children’s interpretations of colour, Sipe (2008) writes that when young children in his research responded to the story *The Whale Song*, which he describes as “a magical contemplative tale”, they observed the use of dark colours to interpret the text,

The general tone of the story—contemplative, reflective of an inner experience—was interpreted by the children mainly through the illustrations, particularly the color palette the illustrator had chosen. (p. 126)

The children's experiences with colours contributed to an appreciation for aesthetics. Reggio Emilia educator Vecchi (2010) observes that aesthetics develop together with reasoning and emotion. In the next category, I will explore children's attention to the aesthetic details of visual literature.

EXPLORING COMPLEXITY

In responding to the picture books, I observed the different ways that many of the children showed an understanding of the complexities of the texts. As I have mentioned previously, we spent approximately two weeks focusing on each of the picture books. By reading and re-reading the stories, and having multiple opportunities to respond, many of the children became more confident in their abilities to read the images of the stories. When I worked with children on literacy response activities in the classroom, or discussed the texts with them during focus groups, they were eager to show and talk about pictures from the stories that they recalled with vivid detail.

RELATING TO CHARACTERS

Maria Nikolajeva (2003) notes the power of the visual in picture books to evoke emotional responses among readers: "Visual images can sometimes be more efficient in conveying the characters' inner life, especially vague, unuttered wishes, fears, daydreams, and other complex psychological states" (p. 46). Given that visual images convey the inner life of characters that are often difficult to put into words, I was interested in how the children would respond to the stories we read. Through the storybook read-alouds, conversations, literacy activities, and focus groups, I was able to observe the capacity that children have for relating to and making sense of the characters' experiences.

Virginia Wolf is a very complex and sophisticated picture book that can be read and appreciated on many levels. The colours throughout the book portray the moods of the characters,

setting the tone of the story. This text addresses difficult feelings, such as sadness and depression. Virginia is feeling so sad and terrible that she has become a wolf, growling at all around her and refusing to get out of bed.

Jack, a Grade One student, acutely observed Virginia's character: "*The reason why she looks like a wolf is because she's upset about stuff*" (Fieldnotes, April 23, 2014). Jack's observation concisely summarized the description of the young girl's feelings. She was very "*upset about stuff*", and through the story as she gradually transforms from a wolf into a girl, she is healed by the power of art, imagination, and the love of her sister Vanessa. The children, through their discussions with the teachers, showed empathy in relating to Virginia and describing what they would do if they were having a bad day or how they could help someone, such as a sibling, to feel better.

Paul pointed out that he had missed hearing the story *Virginia Wolf* as it was read while he was away on his family trip to China in April. Lewis offered an explanation of the story in his own words. As he described the text, he focused on the relationship between the two sisters and how one is a wolf and everything in the house is upside down in the story when she is sad.

Lewis: *Vanessa et Virginia. Virginia est un...* is a wolf because she's very mad.

Heather: Mmhmm.

Lewis: All the time. And the other sister is not, never a wolf, because she's never mad and she's always happy.

Heather: Mmhmm.

Lewis: And then at some point in the story, she like turns everything upside down, **I could show you the picture.** Where is it? [Flipping through the pages of *Virginia Wolf*]

Focus group with Grade Two, June 2014

While Lewis described the story to the group, Paul, who was hearing about this picture book for the first time, started drawing a picture while looking at the front cover. The context of the focus group gave Paul a chance to catch up on what he had missed, and for Lewis to engage in narrating a story to his friend. Both Lewis' description and Paul's picture show an understanding of the relationship between the sisters in the story. For instance, in Paul's picture, which was based on

the book cover, he has represented the wolf Virginia and her sister Vanessa reaching towards one another (see Figure 21).



Figure 21. Paul's drawing of *Virginia Wolf*.

While looking at the front cover of the *Je suis fou de Vava*, Yasmin and Hope, in Grade One, discussed the relationship between the characters in the story. By looking closely at the picture, the girls inferred that the boy in the story was shy.

Heather: Why are there always butterflies around Vava?

Yasmin: Because she likes the butterflies.

Heather: She likes butterflies.

Hope: She loves the boy.

Yasmin: Yeah.

Heather: Oh, I think so too. Do you think that's why he's happy?

Yasmin & Hope: Yes.

Yasmin: Because he's shy. He's shy!

Heather: He's shy. What makes you say that?

Hope: He's moving away. But what is he saying here? Is he saying, 'ooh, nooo?!'

Yasmin: He's shy!

Classroom literacy activity, Grade One, May 7, 2014

In Jalindu's artwork created with pastels and paint (Figure 22), she focuses on the ending of the story *Je suis fou de Vava*. In this part of the story, the boy is riding his bike away after giving flowers to Vava. She also wrote the phrase from the text where Vieux-Os exclaims that Vava loves him, and he is running to let the world know. As in the conversation between Yasmin and Hope, Jalindu in Grade Two paid attention to the visual details depicting the complex feelings of the characters.



Figure 22. Jalindu's visual response to *Je suis fou de Vava*.

COMPASSION FOR CHARACTERS' EXPERIENCES

Many of the children's responses to the feelings and experiences of the characters revealed their understanding of the complexity of the human experience. The children showed an attachment to and connection with the characters.

When the Grade Two classes wrote letters to the author of *Je suis fou de Vava*, many of them mentioned a character they could relate to or a part of the story they appreciated. Many of the children's responses showed their compassion for the characters, as well an appreciation for the vivid and lively details in the story. For instance, Nicolas, in his letter, tells Dany Laferrière that he likes the part when the boy's heart is falling because he is so nervous when he sees the girl he loves. He also notes that his favourite part of the story was when the boy was outside alone on the porch at night, where he fell asleep without his grandmother realizing, and woke up in the middle of the

night alone suddenly surrounded by creatures. Nicolas was proud of his letter as he read aloud enthusiastically during a focus group. As he read, his letter prompted laughter among his friends who also appreciated the humour in his note.

- Nicolas:** *Ce que j'aime le plus c'est quand son coeur tombe.*
What I like the most is when his heart falls to the ground.
[Giggling among the group]
- Nicolas:** *Ma partie favoris c'est quand Vieux-Os va dans la chambre avec les monstres.*
My favourite part is when Vieux-Os goes into the room with the monsters.
- Heather:** Oh!
[More giggling among the group]
- Nicolas:** *Mon personnage favoris c'est Vieux-Os.*
My favourite character is Vieux-Os.

Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014

Nicolas' pastel drawing (Figure 23) depicts his visual response to the story *Je suis fou de Vava*. They were asked to find a part of the story that most appealed to them and to write a sentence or two from that page and then make a visual representation. Nicolas' drawing shows his attention to the way the boy fell asleep peacefully on the yellow and blue balcony of his grandmother's house, and how he finds himself all alone in the dark surrounded by strange creatures. When Nicolas spoke of this book, he said that it was his favourite book because it was "*the most creative one*" (Focus group, June 11, 2014).



Figure 23. Nicolas' pastel drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*.

Interestingly, many of the children in the different classes chose to illustrate the part of the story that Nicolas described. They showed empathy for the boy feeling terrified in the dark night. When he is outside and surrounded by skeletons and monsters, he is vulnerable and scared. This is an important element of the book as the grandmother had been telling him oral stories earlier that night. When the young boy's grandmother realizes he is outside she brings him back into her house (see Figures 24, 25, & 26).



Figure 24. Karavai's painting of *Je suis fou de Vava*.



Figure 25. Marjeena's pastel drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*.



Figure 26. Aleem's pastel drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*.

Although Aleem, Marjeena, Nicolas, and Karavai have all depicted the part of the story where the young boy wakes up and finds himself alone outside at night and his street is suddenly filled with monsters, each of their images is distinctive and unique. They have all used their own imagination and made intentional choices about the compositionality and content of their images to show empathy and the complexity of emotion (Rose, 2012). For instance, Aleem's drawing shows the young boy in bold colours surrounded by the darkness of the night and creatures that are white. Karavai's drawing of the boy's house shows that the home is surrounded by the creatures. Marjeena has selected a green background, with the young boy in the centre, and purple creatures all over the page. Both Marjeena and Aleem have paid attention to the boy's facial expression, although in Marjeena's picture the boy is yawning with his eyes closed and in Aleem's picture the boy has his eyes wide open. In contrast to the others, Nicolas portrayed the boy from the back of his head of flowing long dark hair, with his hands up against the bright yellow house.

I am deeply intrigued by how many children, both girls and boys, were interested in the monsters and zombies in the story. This finding is consistent with research on young children's artwork, as Thompson (2013) notes in her study with preschool children drawing in sketchbooks: "Monsters and ghosts were frequent and exciting subjects for drawing. Once they were introduced in conversation, these fascinating and scary creatures were sure to replicate themselves around the drawing tables" (p. 96). Furthermore, Sloan (2003) writes that books that capture children's attention can foster a love of reading and writing, as

There is a story or poem to raise a goose bump on the toughest skin, and we are well advised to help each child find it. A child who has never thrilled to words will remain indifferent to reading and writing them. (p. 12)

I would add that children will also become more interested in drawing the stories of the books that thrill and excite them, and those that offer them a new perspective or deeper understanding of humanity. For example, Paul chose to illustrate a part of the story where the young boy, Vieux-Os, is looking out of his window and sees a soldier in dark glasses. In the story, the village of Petit-Goâve, Haiti, is under dictatorship and the villagers must abide by a strict curfew at night. Paul's

image depicts the fear of the young boy, and he wrote at the end of the poem that the boy was having a horrible nightmare about the soldiers.



Figure 27. Paul's drawing of *Le baiser mauve de Vava*.

As the children became more familiar with the stories we read over time, they were keen to share their opinions with one another. The story read-alouds in the classroom, literacy activities, and focus groups provided ample opportunities for discussing and sharing thoughts regarding the literature. In the following focus group conversation in Grade Two, the children were eager to show me pictures and to talk about them. They were very engaged in listening to one another and in expressing their thoughts about the characters in the stories.

Heather: Do you want to tell me what your favourite story was that we read? We started with *Fourchon* and then we read *Virginia Wolf*...

Arjunu: And after we did that one *Je suis fou de Vava* and after we did the one with the bisou thing and after we did Suki.

Heather: *Oui*. So what was your favourite one, Arjunu?

Arjunu: Ummm...[*Thinking*]

Anna: My favourite one was the one when they're opening the window.
[*Le baiser mauve de Vava*]

Arjunu: My favourite one is the one with the *bisou*, because the one when the boy kissed the girl was so funny.

Heather: *Je suis fou de Vava*...oh!

Jalindu: Le bai...le bai...[*Loking at the book title*]

Heather: *Le baiser mauve de Vava!*

Jalindu: Le baiser...

Arjunu: It was so funny, he kissed the girl!

Heather: Why did he give her a purple kiss?

Arjunu: I don't know.

Heather: Oh, there's a reason.

Jalindu: Oh, here is it! Here is it!! [*Excitedly turning the pages*]

Heather: Why?

Arjunu: Because she was sick.

Heather: Did it make her better?

Arjunu: Yes.

Jalindu: Yeah.

Arjunu: And look, the ducks, the duckies are coming like an airplane so that the black dog...[*Le baiser mauve de Vava*]

Jalindu: I like this picture.

- Arjunu:** The one with the grandma?
- Jalindu:** Yeah.
- Anna:** I like this part.
- Jalindu:** And I like, and I like this one. [*Flipping through the book*]
- Arjunu:** The one with the bus... ?
- Jalindu:** Yeah.
- Anna:** I want to show you... *Let me show you which one I like.*

Focus group, Grade Two, June 18, 2014

While Jalindu, Arjunu, Anna, and Aidan were discussing the characters in the books we had read by Dany Laferrière, Anna exclaimed, “*I like the way Vava’s country looks!*” (Focus group, June 18, 2014) and she decided to write a postcard to Vava (Figure 28). Her gesture, of writing a postcard, was Anna’s way of expressing her compassion for the character.



Figure 28: Anna’s postcard for Vava.

As noted by researchers, in respecting and listening to children’s voices, we also need to pay attention to silences in research with children (Lewis, 2009; Spyrou, 2015). One of the boys in this group, Aidan, who did not speak up as often, was quietly focused on drawing and working with

plasticine during our conversation. He was drawing a picture of Suki dancing (Figure 29). Arjunu expressed himself through his artwork, although he was also listening closely to the conversation and spoke up when he felt like it. During the conversation, his friends noted his drawing of Suki. When I asked about his favourite book, he showed me *Le kimono de Suki*, and showed me his favourite page of the girl listening to the drummers playing taiko drums at the Japanese *matsuri* (festival).



Figure 29. Aidan's drawing of Suki.

NOTICING VISUAL DETAILS

Picture books with sophisticated illustrations and narrative invited multiple readings, as each reading offered new perspectives and insights for meaning-making. Nikolajeva (2010) notes that children are often more attentive than adults to the visual aspect of picture books,

The non-linear nature of images stimulates various reading directions, even though some details may suggest the order of reading; complex images compel the reader to stop and browse, creating a narrative pause. Here, young children show extreme competence, studying the images carefully, while adults, focusing on verbal codes, feel an urge to go on to the next doublespread. (p. 31)

In the following excerpt of a conversation with Julian and Jayden, two boys in Grade One, they showed me their interest in looking at the visual details as they told me the story of *Le baiser mauve de Vava*. The boys showed me that they were attentive to the plot, characters, setting, and themes of the story, as presented through the visual.

Julian: Well, this is a book about Old Bones and Vava. So since it's about Old Bones and Vava, this is the second book about it. So, that means they already had fun together. And then there's a new character in the book that I didn't see in the last book...

Jayden: And I see Marquis.

Heather: *Marquis, c'est le chien.*

Jayden: *Oui.*

Julian: And then we see some little tiny details on some little books. [*They are fairytales*]

Heather: On the bookshelf.

Julian: Yup. On the bookshelf.

Heather: And who's he sitting with?

Julian: He's sitting with his grandma.

Jayden: The grandma.

Heather: *Avec la grandmaman. Quel est son nom?*

Jayden: Rose?

Heather: Da.

Jayden: Da. That's a short name. D-a.

Julian: And then until one day, Vava's mother comes crying.

Jayden: And he told her that her son is sick.

Julian: You mean her daughter!

Jayden: I mean her daughter is sick.

Julian: A son is a boy and a daughter is a girl. And until Old Bones meets his friend, and he said, "Yo! You wanna play with me?" [Speaking with expression]. And he says, "No, something bad happened. The duck told me."

Heather: *Oh, oui.*

Jayden: And then...

Julian: And there you see Vava as the sun.

Classroom literacy activity, Grade One, May 29, 2014

By paying close attention to the visual details in the stories, and enjoying texts for their aesthetic quality, the children were immersed in the imaginary and creative world of the stories. When I asked a group of boys in Grade Two, during a focus group in June, if they liked hearing stories read aloud, William's reply indicated his interest in engaging with the arts, as he was particularly focused on the details in the texts.

Heather: Do you like hearing the stories read to you?

Saayakann: *Oui.*

William: I like drawing them too!

Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014

I was able to observe William's engagement with the visual and in creating his pictures in response to stories, as each time we engaged in visual arts he would be very concentrated on his artistic responses to stories. Sometimes he was so focused on a particular aspect of the work, that he would not have time to finish during the allotted time period. From my first time in the classroom, I could see that William was interested in drawing, and his interest was consistent throughout. He was focused when he would draw, and looked carefully at a page in the story examining the colours. William searched for humorous and unique images in the stories, such as the one he recreated from *Je suis fou de Vava* of the notary walking out in a fancy suit in the rain, when the raindrops do not fall on him, but all around him as he walks (see Figure 30). William would become completely absorbed by his drawing when he worked, and yet he also enjoyed laughing and sharing with his friends. Furthermore, William's attention to details often showed his appreciation for aspects that could best be represented visually, such as the atmosphere or setting of the story or the character's facial expressions. His attention to details surprised me. He has depicted, in his drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*, the distinction between the notary who is dressed up very formally and the young people around him dressed casually. In his response to *Le kimono de Suki* (see Figure 31), William spent his time focusing on the colours of the cherry blossoms in the tree, blowing in the wind, as well as the shades of blue in the sky. William's artwork provides us with insight into his awareness of the ways that images can depict subtle aspects of the natural environment, such as rain, sky, or colours of cherry blossoms, through the use of colour, line, and shading to represent movement and atmosphere.



Figure 30. William's pastel drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*.



Figure 31. William's painting in response to *Le kimono de Suki*.

Ngozi, in Grade One, also paid close attention to the visual images in the stories. I noticed that she would always sit right at the front, near the teacher, to attain the best view of the book. For Ngozi, seeing the images was an important part of her engagement with the texts. She wanted to actively take part in the read-alouds. In May, when I read the story *Je suis fou de Vava* to the Grade One class in Madame Mai's absence, Ngozi made a powerful statement to her class while she was listening to the story. While I was reading, one of the boys made a comment that the character Vava's eyes looked Chinese. A couple of children beside him giggled. I stopped reading to discuss how we all had different eyes and that it was important to respect people of all different cultures. We briefly talked about how it could be hurtful to make a comment based on physical appearance or nationality. Ngozi, sitting right at the front, proclaimed to her class, "Yeah, 'cause that's racist!" (Fieldnotes, May 2014). And there was a pause in the classroom before we continued to read the story. I admired Ngozi's courage in speaking up to the class and I did notice that her friends had listened. While listening closely to the story, Ngozi focused on the visual images. Her attentiveness to the visual text is evident in the painting that she made which portrays the setting and the character Vava (Figure 32).



Figure 32. Ngozi's painting of *Je suis fou de Vava*.

DISCUSSION: LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO VISUAL LITERATURE

In this chapter, I have shared my analysis of children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books. The three main categories of this chapter are *Responding to Literature by Using Imagination*, *Creating with My Hands*, and *Exploring Complexity*. In each of these categories, I have presented examples of the dynamic and active responses of children listening to stories and engaging with the texts. In relation to the overriding theme of this chapter, **All My Ideas Flow**, it is evident that stories evoke different responses among children in the classrooms when they are free to become a part of the imaginary world of the visual literature.

Engaging with the visual is central to the ways that children construct meaning and produce their own images (Rose, 2012). As noted by Rose (2012), "images are never transparent windows onto the world. They interpret the world; they display it in particular ways; they represent it" (p. 2). The children I have discussed in this chapter have each represented their own views of the world in their images. This chapter has explored the ways that children expressed their identities and interests through visual arts and conversations in response to picture books. For example, the drawings and paintings by Hope, Paul, Arjunu, and Ngozi illustrated meaningful aspects of their interpretations of the stories as well as connections to their lives.

Möller and Allen (2000) note that many literary theorists have emphasized "aesthetic transactions" with literature. Citing Rosenblatt (1995), Möller and Allen (2000) write that "(a)n evocation or 'poem' is created in the active coming together of the text, the reader's cumulative life experiences and perspectives, and the context of the reading event (e.g. classroom discussions)" (p. 147; see also Rosenblatt, 1995). Within this project and the context of reading the visual literature, many of the children brought their life experiences to the reading event. By engaging aesthetically and using imagination, the young readers were able to make sense of the characters' experiences.

The stories *Fourchon*, *Virginia Wolf*, *Je suis fou de Vava*, *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, *La fête des morts*, and *Le kimono de Suki* offered rich experiences for children to engage aesthetically. The children's

visual responses to the texts are like “snapshots” (Kendrick & McKay, 2004) that illustrate their engagements with contemporary visual literature. Maxine Greene (2001) remarks that art enables us to see in new ways as it “provokes us to engage persons as imagining, thinking, feeling, perceiving, active beings, realizing that the more they know the more they are likely to see and hear” (p. 56). As researchers of children’s literature have noted, the ability to engage with complex issues in literature is perhaps often underestimated within our society. The findings presented in this chapter concur with a statement by children’s author Sunkyong Cho (2012),

I don’t believe that explaining emotionally complex issues to children is easy, but children are well capable of experiencing an array of universal human emotions. They may lack in life experiences, but they too can take part in sharing complexities of emotions if we respect them as fellow beings that can think and reason. (p. 124, as cited in Salisbury & Styles, 2012)

Engaging deeply contributes to an understanding of human emotions. This was made clear as many of the children identified with the emotions and feelings in the texts by taking part in the interpretive act of reading the words and images. For instance, the drawings by Marjeena, Nicholas, Karavai, and Aleem showed a strong understanding of the young boy’s feelings of being scared by his terrible nightmare. Other children identified with the way that Vanessa showed her love for sister Virginia when she was feeling depressed in the story *Virginia Wolf*. The text *Le baiser mauve de Vava* prompted children, such as Rukshana, to show compassion for the young girl Vava who is sick and for her friend Vieux-Os who needs to leave the village.

As articulated by Elizabeth, Sarah, and Marjeena in Grade Two, the act of creating provided a sense of freedom. One of the tensions that exists within the educational system is to create ample time for children to explore with art media. Even within this project, where we were focused on listening to children’s voices, there was not always time for children to complete their work within the allotted time. As a researcher volunteering in the classrooms, I was able to work with groups of children to give them more time when possible. Sometimes the teachers were flexible in adding more time for the artwork or for reading visual texts, as I will discuss further in Chapter Six. The

time spent on engaging with visual texts and in responding through visual arts contributes to the freedom that children need to explore and develop their creativity. And yet, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all children have access to diverse literature and the freedom to express their ideas and opinions. Hamblin (2002) notes that children's art experiences in contemporary classrooms are often limited,

Creativity must be expressed in specific time increments (one hour or less), noise must be kept to a minimum, work produced must not be messy, the clean-up of materials must be accomplished in approximately five minutes, work spaces are depersonalized, and the products must be easily stored. (p. 13, as cited in Anning & Ring, 2004)

There was a high level of engagement with stories among the children I worked with, and yet this is only a beginning. By making personal connections to the texts and creating representations of their interpretations through visual arts, the children gained confidence and agency, as they became "strong poets" sharing their own stories. I argue that more time is needed in classrooms for children to experience rich aesthetic engagements with literature and for educators to hear their one hundred languages. The teachers also noted that the children benefited from having more time to engage with stories. For instance, Madame Lili observed,

*Peut-être si on avait plus du temps avec Le
kimono de Suki...*

If we could have had more time with
Suki's Kimono...

Interview, June 2014

This was because we only had one week to read *Le kimono de Suki*, rather than two weeks as with most of the other books. In contrast, we spent one month in Grade Two reading the books by Dany Leferrière (two weeks with *Je suis fou de Vava* and two weeks with *Le baiser mauve de Vava*). Madame Lili noted further,

Puis on a eu deux livres avec les mêmes personnages. Ça aide aussi. Mais ils ont bien aimé ça. Ils ont vraiment identifié aux personnages.

We had two books with the same characters. That helped; they loved that. They really identified with the characters.

Interview, June 2014

This brings me back to the notion of “narrative continuity” (Paley, 1997, p. 74) in which children become familiar with stories over time. Genishi and Dyson (2009) have emphasized the urgent need for “returning time and space for play, story, and imagination to a secure place on the curricular shelves” (p. 80).

In Chapter Six, **Listening with Your Heart**, I will explore the ways that teachers engage children with literature and the possibilities for language and literacy pedagogy in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

6

LISTENING WITH YOUR HEART

*The wisdom of practice goes beneath, beyond, or through language, and it is profound.
This knowing is messy, seldom predictable or generalizable, rarely precise, and known and
learned through our eyes, ears, hands, heart, and soul as it is through our minds.*

Neilsen Glenn, 1994, p. 6

In this chapter, I will focus on the role of the teacher in listening to children's responses to contemporary picture books. The theme of this chapter, emerging from my data, is **Listening with Your Heart**. As the teachers and children read together, there was time and space for conversations and interactions in the classroom, enabling relationships and connections through the shared experience of responding to literature. Central to the theme of the chapter, **Listening with Your Heart**, is the passion and love (Goldstein, 1998; Greene, 1995; Paley, 1997) and an awareness of selfhood and openness to connecting with others (Greene, 1973; Palmer, 2004) that teachers bring to working with young readers, enabling stories to come alive in the classroom.

The teachers, Madame Lili and Madame Mai, were interested in opening up space, through literature and responses, in the classroom to enable the children's voices and thoughts to be heard. The children's responses are described in detail in the previous chapter, **All My Ideas Flow**.

Importantly, creating the spaces for children to engage with and respond to literature included taking time to explore stories by reading aloud, discussing, and engaging in interpreting the meaning of both the words and images.

Many educational theorists and philosophers have advocated for the ways that teachers can learn from listening to children, and seeing children for all of their strengths and capabilities (Davies, 2014; Mavers, 2011; McArdle & Boldt, 2013; Paley, 1997). The Reggio Emilia philosophy of education advocates for a pedagogy of listening and one hundred languages of children (see Rinaldi, 2006). Palmer (2004) observes that a participant in a circle of trust commented that through engaging in soul-searching, “I learned to listen openly for the soul of another, for that which is genuine and sacred” (p. 143). Listening to and connecting with students involves “Coexisting with them, opening up perspectival possibilities along with them” (Greene, 1973, p. 270). Literacy educator Lorri Neilsen Glenn (2010) reminds us of the way that “listening with the ear of the heart” fosters connections and relationships that inspire learning,

Contemplation—slowing time, being mindful, seeking the grace of imagining—
develops in each of us a sense of what we stand for and what we can achieve.

Heart—its connotations of centre, of source, and of enduringness—is where
authentic acts of learning begin. We seldom talk of heart in education, or of spirit,
for that matter. But listening with the ear of the heart is an act of the spirit that can
reconnect us more forcefully, more enduringly, than high speed or Bluetooth...We
can create time anywhere for each of us to turn away from noise, confusion, bells, a
blizzard of multi-syllabic edu-speak, from acronyms and to-do lists, toward the gifts
that a free hour, a still river, or an empty horizon can bring. (Neilsen Glenn, 2010,
para. 17)

The teachers’ choices around the picture books and literacy activities informed the theme of this project, *Les enfants qui parlent aux enfants* or *Children Speaking with Children*. Goldstein (1998) draws on the work of Eisner (1982) to describe how important it is for children to have access to,

All modalities and all forms of information representation. Each form of representation is unique and exists for a specific reason: poetry says things that cannot be communicated through any other medium, as does mathematics, or dance...if children are never encouraged to write poetry, or paint, or to sing, those forms of thinking will never be developed. (p. 50)

Therefore, by encouraging the children to listen closely to their heart, and to express themselves through their “one hundred languages” (Rinaldi, 2006), the teachers enabled children to explore their own ideas and interests in response to the texts.

This chapter is shaped around the following categories within this theme of **Listening with Your Heart**. The following table illustrates the rules of inclusion for each category.

CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES	RULE OF INCLUSION
<p><i>You need to listen to your heart</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing on book characters’ experiences to guide dialogue • Thinking outside the box 	<p>This category refers to the ways in which teachers encouraged children to develop compassion and self-understanding through listening to the diverse voices in the stories.</p>
<p><i>Teachers’ aesthetic engagements with literature</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring new horizons 	<p>This category refers to the teachers reflecting and engaging with literature. This relates to teachers’ interests in reading and exploring new perspectives through children’s books.</p>
<p><i>Teacher’s literacy histories</i></p>	<p>This refers to teachers reflecting on their own language and literacy experiences, from childhood to present. The teachers’ reflections are connected to the ways in which they bring literature and their philosophy to the classroom.</p>
<p><i>Teaching in the moment: Spontaneity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making personal connections to literature 	<p>This refers to teachers listening attentively to children’s words and images in response to literature, and acknowledging the personal connections that children make to the texts.</p>

CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES	RULE OF INCLUSION
<i>Navigating the complexity of picture books</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are capable readers 	This refers to teachers guiding children in their navigation of reading the complex words and images in contemporary picture books, validating their responses, and emphasizing visual literacy.
<i>Fostering a deep engagement with picture books</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom environment Exploring new perspectives through visual literacy 	This refers to ways that teachers encourage children to enter the world of the story by creating a positive and comfortable space for reading and responding to literature in the classroom.
<i>You make a difference</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Love of teaching Courage Respect 	This refers to the teachers' philosophy of connecting and building relationships with the children in their classrooms through listening to children's voices.

Table 11. *Listening with Your Heart* categories.

YOU NEED TO LISTEN TO YOUR HEART

In this section, I will discuss ways that the teachers actively engaged children with issues in the stories, such as having self-confidence, caring for others, and being proud of one's own identity, through dialogue in the classroom. These themes were present in the stories we read including *Fourchon*, *Virginia Wolf*, *Le kimono de Suki*, *Je suis fou de Vava*, *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, and *La fête des morts*. The literature served as an entry point and “important catalyst” to building understanding through compassionate listening to the diverse voices in the texts *and* the voices in the classroom (Möller & Allen, 2000, p. 117).

DRAWING ON BOOK CHARACTERS' EXPERIENCES TO GUIDE DIALOGUE

This subcategory is connected to the ways that Madame Lili and Madame Mai supported the children's interpretation of the characters' experiences in order to heighten their awareness of the themes in the literature and to make personal connections. Möller and Allen (2000) have observed

that the children benefit from the support of an “active mentor” to guide children’s engagements with texts. As noted by children’s literature scholar, Marcela Terrusi (2014), it is important to enable children to listen to the voices of the authors of the texts. By listening to and being attentive to the stories, as well as listening to the children’s responses to the stories, teachers foster and encourage meaningful engagement with literature.

For example, with the picture book *Fourchon*, the character Fourchon was bullied by the other kitchen utensils and made to feel excluded from playing with others. When he tried to disguise himself by dressing up with a pointed hat to look like a fork or with a bowl on his head to look like a spoon, he was only teased and laughed at. The story’s theme of finding one’s place and a sense of belonging speaks to readers of all ages.

While reading *Fourchon*, Madame Lili asked her Grade Two class to consider how each person is unique and different, and that this is what makes everyone special. In responding to this book, she encouraged her class to consider how each child has personal qualities that make them individual and distinctive (like Fourchon). This was a way of relating to the character in *Fourchon* who discovers his own unique qualities of being a mix between a spoon (his mother) and a fork (his father). While reading aloud, Madame Lili asked questions such as ‘*C’est quoi son sentiment?*’ (*What is he feeling?*) to engage the children in thinking about the character. When the children replied that he was sad, the teacher went deeper with the conversation by asking them to think about what made him sad (being excluded). Following the story, Madame Lili, asked,

Regarde tout le monde. Est-ce qu’on est pareil? Non. On est différent. Des fois c’est physique (les cheveux, les yeux, la couleur de la peau). Des fois c’est dans notre cœur...

Look, everyone. Are we all the same? No! We are different. Sometimes it is physical: hair colour, eyes, skin tone. Sometimes it is inside our heart...

Fieldnotes, April 10, 2014

In the Grade One classroom, Madame Mai also engaged her class in a discussion of their unique qualities after reading *Fourchon*. She wrote down the words of the children on the white board (Figure 33) as examples before they worked individually on their written and visual responses.

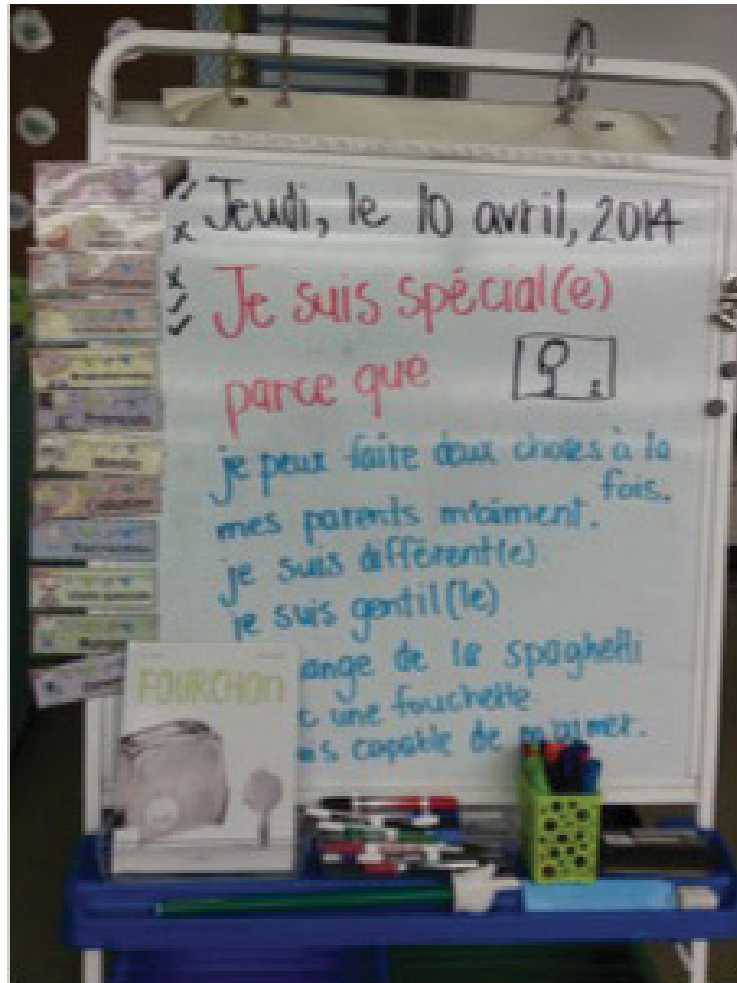


Figure 33. Listening to children's responses to *Fourchon*.

At times, reading aloud from the stories was a dramatic performance, in which the teachers used gesture, tone of voice, expression, and body language to engage children. For example, in the excerpt below from the Grade One classroom, Madame Mai danced with her arms while she read aloud from *Le kimono de Suki*. Pausing at a pivotal point in the plot of the story, she stopped to ask the class a question about the text.

Madame Mai showed how the young girl Suki was dancing in front her class in the story *Le kimono de Suki*. While she read, the teacher moved her arms and head to each side to demonstrate Suki's movement. The children watched her and listened attentively.

- Madame Mai:** When she's done, the whole class is quiet. Why are they quiet?
- Gabrielle:** I think they're staring at her because they're jealous.
- Hope:** They probably like her.
- Nadia:** They're probably staring at her because the belt is so golden (obi).
- Lucinda:** They liked her dance.
- Deepa:** They were shocked.
- Madame Mai:** Oh, that's exactly it! They didn't expect it.
...*Il faut écouter ton coeur. (You need to listen to your heart).* If someone is pressuring you to do something, you don't need to do it.
- Gabrielle:** It makes her remember who they are. She can wear her kimono whenever she wants. It's her own body.

Fieldnotes, June 2014

The girls who were discussing this text in their classroom were engaged in dialogue with their teacher.⁹ As the story describes a girl in Grade One, the same age as the children in the class, the children were able to identify with her feelings as the teacher guided the conversation. The images in the text, with the young girl dancing, evoked response and dialogue. Möller and Allen (2000) describe a reading group in which four girls of African American heritage, who struggled with reading in class, participated in reading with the guidance of a researcher. The selected text was chosen due to its readability; it was “ripe with discussion material, and had an African American female main character about the same age as the girls” (p. 115). The texts that the teachers and I collaboratively selected were also chosen for their relevance to children and the topics that would lead to rich discussions. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter Four, the texts were also selected for the quality of the illustrations. During the teacher interview in June, Madame Mai noted that although the interactions with the texts enabled some children to connect with texts and to feel a sense of belonging, she felt there were still challenges in reaching all of the students in her classes.

⁹ Throughout this chapter, emphasis added is indicated by bolded words.

Um. Surtout pour ce qui était capable de se relier à l'histoire. Comme Ngozi pour Vava. Pas pour tout le monde par exemple. Je pense qu'il y en a qui n'ont pas compris le but de l'activité. Mais la plupart ont compris... Il y en a qui n'ont juste pas compris le but de l'histoire. Comme oh, c'est une bonne histoire, elle a un beau kimono. Mais ce n'est pas ça le but. Donc il y en a qui étaient capable d'aller un peu plus profondément et de voir le moral de l'histoire. Et il n'y en a qui n'étaient pas capable...

Um, especially for those who were able to connect with the story. Like Ngozi for Vava. Although, not for everyone. I think that there were some who just didn't understand the purpose of the activity. But most of them understood...there were some who didn't understand the purpose of the story. Like, oh, that's a good story, she has a nice kimono! But that was not the purpose! So some were able to go more deeply and to see the theme of the story and others were not able to...

Interview, June 2014

It is interesting to note that Ngozi, who Madame Mai remarked had made the strongest connection to the character (Vava), was also one of the students in her class who struggled the most with reading and literacy. Madame Mai frequently spoke of her concerns for Ngozi's ability to understand concepts and to reach the official standards for Grade One. However, through the picture book read-alouds, where the visual was emphasized and stories were culturally relevant, and through Ngozi's enthusiasm for the stories, along with the support of the "active mentor" of both the teacher and the researcher, she was one of the children who participated most actively in the stories.

Madame Mai's comment regarding *Le kimono de Suki* showed her concern that some children did not fully comprehend the deeper meaning of the story. Her statement raises the issue of reader response that goes beyond the surface level of the text. In other words, we must pay attention to ways of engaging with critical literacy through diverse multicultural literature to promote intercultural understanding (Short, 2009) and social justice (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013). Later on in this chapter, I will discuss the theme of navigating the complexity of picture books.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

The subcategory of thinking outside the box refers to the teachers' reflection and practice that fostered children's creative engagement with literature. I realize that this term is somewhat of a cliché, although I am using it as it came from the data in one of the interviews with the Grade Two teacher. In the examples above, both Madame Mai and Madame Lili encouraged the children to engage with the themes of the stories by listening to the voices of the characters and to their own inner voices. In doing so, the teachers supported the children in reflecting on their own identities and relationships. This was particularly made meaningful through creative responses where there was space for children to create (as I have detailed in Chapter Five). Eisner (1998) argues,

...the genuinely good school increases individual differences, it does not diminish them. A genuine educational process cultivates productive idiosyncrasy, it does not homogenize children into standardized forms. Neither the cookie cutter nor the assembly line is an apt model for education. The studio is a much more congenial image. Teachers define opportunities and stimulate direction. They lead children, and at times, take their lead from them. Providing opportunities for children to pursue what they have a feel for—to follow their bliss, as Joseph Campbell used to say—is not an inappropriate policy for guiding educational practice. (p. 18)

Eisner's argument for teachers to lead children in being themselves relates to the way that the teachers encouraged the children to be aware of their individual interests, particularly through creative expression. Möller and Allen (2000) note that reading response research with struggling readers has indicated that children who need more support with understanding literature benefit from the space that teachers create for responding through arts and drama (see Wilhelm, 1997).

In Madame Lili's words she describes how she encourages children to think outside of the box,

Je veux qu'ils réfléchissent un peu et je veux voir comment ils vont travailler. Puis, non, c'est ça. C'est un défaut qu'on a beaucoup en enseignement et surtout au primaire. Les enseignants ils ont dans leur tête une idée. Il faut que ça sorte comme ça. Donc l'enfant à aucune aptitude pour dire je vais voir en dehors de la boîte pour voir comment ça pourrait être. Moi, je n'aime pas ça. J'aime que l'enfant il peut vraiment être libre. Et si son dessin ça sort comme c'est comme ça. Et si son texte est de même c'est comme ça. Moi, bien évidemment je corrige. Puis, je les guide.

I want them to reflect a little and I want to see how they work. That's it. It's a fault we have far too often in teaching, especially in primary schools. Teachers have an idea in their head. It has to be like this. Then the child does not develop an aptitude to say I am going to think outside of the box to see how it could be. I don't like that. I want the child to be free. And if their drawing is like that, it's like that. And if their text is that way, it's like that. Of course, I give corrections. And I guide them.

Interview, April 16, 2014

When her Grade Two classes drew pastel pictures in response to *Je suis fou de Vava*, Madame Mai invited a creative engagement by encouraging the students to engage aesthetically with the words and images. The books were provided for the children to look at and decide on a particular phrase or part of the story they wanted to illustrate. Their pictures represented their individual interpretations and meaning-making in response to the text. For instance, in Rasmeen's drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*, she has depicted Vieux-Os swimming in the ocean among the sea creatures. The part of the story that she was depicting was,

Le ciel est bleu c'est à cause de la mer.

If the sky is blue, it's because of the sea.

In the book, the boy is a bit timid to swim in the water as he is worried that the fish will bite his feet. However, Rasmeen engages with the poetic phrase from the text and created her own interpretation, with the boy swimming freely. The picture below is from the display of children's work that Madame Mai made at the front entrance of the school.



Figure 34. Rasmeen's pastel drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*.

TEACHERS' AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENTS WITH LITERATURE

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS

A central aspect of working with the teachers in this project was to share with them in the aesthetic and affective experience of reading literature while we co-planned for teaching and selecting picture books for the classroom. This began from our initial meetings, where we looked at and shared thoughts about teaching with selected texts. Through discussions surrounding literature, in the literacy meetings, interviews with teachers, informal conversations, and in my observations in the classrooms, I was interested in the teachers' engagements with literature and how this was closely connected to their own literacy and teaching histories.

Engaging with literature, as a form of art, can be liberating for teachers (Greene, 1995). If literature can set teachers free, what are the possibilities for engaged pedagogy with picture books in primary classrooms? After our first meeting in March, when we returned from our lunch and walked back to the school, Madame Mai mentioned to me that she was really excited to start something new with her class by exploring new literature and even poetry. On one occasion, when the Grade One teacher was working on her own pastel drawing of *Je suis fou de Vava*, she told me that she was probably having even more fun than the children were. She had been working on her drawing in the teachers' room during the lunch hour, and when other teachers inquired about her work, and she laughed because she was so focused on creating an image.

Literature, and engaging with visual responses, contributed to pleasure for both the teachers and children. This happened not only with the books that we read in this project, but also was evident in what the teachers said about their work prior to the project. For instance, early on during my time in the school, Madame Mai had spent time carefully decorating her classroom door with Eric Carle's classic story *La chenille qui fait les trous* (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*). She had included photos of all of the children on the door display.

As I describe below, both Madame Lili and Madame Mai shared their literacy histories and their interests in reading with me, as well as openness to exploring new horizons through contemporary children's literature. From the outset of the project, Madame Lili and Madame Mai said they were interested in reading more literature with their classes. During our first collaborative meeting, the conversations enabled us to connect with one another as we thought about how the stories would be of interest for teaching Language Arts. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the teachers were both very interested in books. The teachers borrowed books to read at home, and thought about how they would teach with certain texts. The literature, as a form of art, inspired us to think in new ways together, bringing energy to the project and to our co-planning. As we collaboratively worked on developing the theme of *Children Speaking to Children*, the teachers reflected on ways to engage their classes with the literature.

For example, Madame Mai and Madame Lili discussed how they would invite their classes to make objects with plasticine in response to *Fourchon*.

Madame Lili:	<i>Parce que dans ma classe l'année passée j'avais commandé plein de pâte à modeler. On peut demander aux enfants de faire un mini bonhomme.</i>	In my class, I have a LOT of plasticine that I ordered last year.
Madame Mai:	<i>Est-ce que tu en as assez pour moi?</i>	Do you have enough for me?
Madame Lili:	<i>Oh, oui!</i>	Oh, yeah!
Madame Mai:	<i>Autant que ça! [Laughter]</i>	Oh, you really have that much?! [Laughing]
Madame Lili:	<i>On peut demander aux enfants « faire ton bonhomme ». Pas une copie de Fourchon, mais invente un bonhomme. De quoi il a l'air ton bonhomme?</i>	We could ask the children to make their own character. Not a copy of Spork, but invent your own. What would they look like?
Madame Mai:	<i>On pourrait avoir des objets...comme sur le Smartboard...et tu choisis deux...like you fuse them together.</i>	We could also have objects, like on the Smartboard, and you choose two. Like you fuse them together.

Collaborative Literacy meeting, March 26, 2014

Both of the teachers took the books home to read. Madame Lili read some of the books with her two young daughters, and told me that they especially loved the book *Fourchon* (so much that she kept the book at home for a while and I brought in more copies to the school). In my first interview with Madame Mai, she expressed how she was giving herself time to read as she prepared for teaching with books that were new to her. She was also thinking of planning ahead for her future years of teaching.

J'ai hâte de savoir qu'est-ce que je peux faire avec les livres. J'ai hâte de lire le livre cette semaine. J'ai cinq jours, je vais me donner du temps. Je vais t'envoyer un courriel. Je vais donner des idées de qu'est-ce que je veux faire. Ça me donne des nouvelles idées parce que je ne connais pas Virginia Wolf. Je ne connais pas Fourchon. Toi aussi tu amènes des connaissances que moi je peux utiliser dans les années qui viennent.

I am looking forward to knowing what I will be able to do with the books. I look forward to the book we'll read next week. I have five days, I am going to give myself time. I'll send you an email. I am going to think of ideas of what I will do. It gives me new ideas because I don't know Virginia Wolf. I don't know Fourchon. You also bring knowledge that I will be able to use for the years to come.

Interview, April 17, 2014

The outcome of Mai's engagement with the literature was that as she became deeply familiar with the visual texts, she developed activities and discussion questions to engage the children's responses. She told me that she loved making her own teaching materials and developing curriculum. Mai and Lili were happy to share materials with one another. They often planned together, although they had not previously worked together prior to this project. On the other hand, the books sparked spontaneous teaching moments.

Maxine Greene (1995) writes that,

If we teachers are to develop a humane and liberating pedagogy, we must feel ourselves to be engaged in a dialectical relation. We are more likely to uncover or be able to interpret what we are experiencing if we can at times recapture some of our own spontaneity and some awareness of our own backgrounds, either through communication with children, psychotherapy, or engagement with works of art.

(p. 52)

In other words, when we engage with literature with an open mind and heart, and are attentive to our own responses and to the texts, as well as how the literature may be interpreted in multiple ways, we free ourselves to engage with these texts with our students. Furthermore, as Greene (1995) emphasizes, having an awareness of one's own background is important in order to develop a "liberating pedagogy" through the arts.

TEACHERS' LITERACY HISTORIES

During my interviews with the teachers I asked each of them about their own memories of reading and literacy.

Madame Lili shared about how she had been an avid reader of French books ever since she was a young girl, and presently enjoyed reading with her own young daughters. She had always attended French schools from elementary on, in the Saguenay region of Québec and then post-secondary in Montréal. French is also the language that she primarily speaks in her daily life. Madame Lili shared fond memories of reading, and clearly articulated her love of reading as something she wished to transmit to her daughters.

Madame Lili:	<i>Oui, beaucoup. Beaucoup, beaucoup. Moi, je commençais à lire, mon Dieu, je me souviens qu'à l'âge de dix ans je lisais déjà des romans. J'ai lu plein de livres. C'était comique parce que je lis beaucoup avec mes filles à moi parce que j'adore les livres.</i>	Yes, many, many, many. I started reading, my God, I remember that at the age of ten I was already reading novels. I read so many books. It's funny because I read a lot with my own daughters because I love books.
Heather:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Madame Lili:	<i>Moi, la technologie ça me dit rien. Je trouve qu'il y a rien comme un livre. Puis, je lis beaucoup, beaucoup avec mes enfants. Je suis en train de préparer pour mes filles une boîte avec tous les livres que tu devrais lire dans ta vie.</i>	For me, technology doesn't say very much to me personally. <i>Ifnd there is nothing like a book!</i> I read a lot with my children. I am in the process of preparing for my daughters a box with all the books that you absolutely must read in your life.

Interview, April 16, 2014

When we discussed the texts by Dany Laferrière, Madame Lili was enthusiastic, as she was familiar with the work of this Haitian Québécois writer and immediately recognized his name from the novels she had read. However, she was surprised that he had written children's books and these were not familiar to her. After reading *Je suis fou de Vava*, Madame Lili noted at our March literacy meeting that she felt Dany Laferrière's way of expressing his stories was powerful and that she felt

the children would relate to such realistic themes. Interestingly, in the interview I held with Madame Lili in mid-April, she spoke about her relationship with his writing and how it enabled her to imagine the author's experience. Within this context of teaching children with diverse cultural backgrounds, Madame Lili was eager to see the response of the children to his book *Je suis fou de Vava*, and as she noted, she was certain that they would have a lot of questions about the place of the story, particularly in this diverse school community,

Puis au niveau du volet multiculturel c'est intéressant, je trouve ça amène un autre dynamique, puis les enfants peuvent avoir des réponses à des questions qu'ils se posent. Comme j'ai hâte de voir quand on va faire l'histoire sur Vava, que ça se passe en Haïti, je suis certaine qu'on va avoir une multitude de questions sur Haïti. Puis dans ma classe, je pense pas qu'on a des enfants d'Haïti, il y en a dans l'école, mais moi dans ma classe j'en ai pas.

The multicultural dimension of the books is interesting. I find that it brings a new dynamic, and the children can have answers to questions that they are asking themselves. I am looking forward to seeing when we read the story about Vava, that takes place in Haiti. I am sure that we're going to have a multitude of questions about Haiti. I don't think I have any children from Haiti in my class. There are some in the school, but I don't have Haitian students in my class.

Interview, April 16, 2014

I asked Madame Lili what it was that she particularly liked about Laferrière's writing, in relation to the books she had read previously on her own. Her description of engaging with the text *L'enigme du retour* indicates her interest in his creative use of language to express ideas related to place and memory.

Madame Lili:

C'est les mots. Il choisit toujours les bons mots. J'aime ça comment il écrit. Il y a une partie que c'est un poème. C'est écrit en poème de toute façon : les strophes, les vers.

Heather:

Ça commence avec un poème.

Madame Lili:

*Oui. Et la après ça le texte, il remplit la page comme un vrai roman pendant quelques pages. Là après tu arrives c'est encore un poème. Mais dans le poème tu comprends de quoi il parle. C'est vraiment, c'est pas les nuages et c'est pas un poème sur l'émotion ou quoi. **Il fait une poésie sur son pays.** Ce que j'aime dans le livre là c'est que tu es en Haïti et la oups tu reviens à Montréal. Puis j'ai vraiment trouvé qu'il a vraiment touché probablement, moi je ne sais pas. Je ne suis pas expatriée mais il a vraiment réussi à toucher c'est quoi les sentiments quand tu reviens chez vous après trente-cinq ans ça doit être assez spécial. Puis, moi, même si je ne suis pas expatriée, j'ai réussi à me figurer comment ça pourrait être.*

It's the words. He always chooses the right words. I like his style of writing. There is one part that is a poem. It's written like a poem anyway: lines, verses...

It starts with a poem.

Yes. And after that, he fills the page like a novel for a few pages. Then you come to a poem again. But in the poem you understand what he is saying. It's really, it's not just fluffy clouds and it's not just a poem about emotions. **He is writing a poem about his country.** What I like in the book is that it's in Haiti and then oops you come back to Montréal. And I find that he really touches, probably, I don't know... I am not an expat but I find that he really touches the feelings of when you come back to your country after being away for thirty-five years. That must really be quite extraordinary. And, me, even if I'm not an expat, I was able to imagine myself there.

Interview, April 16, 2014

L'enigme du retour is written for adults. Madame Lili's openness to being attentive to the author's voice and experience in the text facilitated her connection to his children's books, *Je suis fou de Vava* and *Le baiser mauve de Vava* and the desire to share them with her students. Furthermore, her recognition of the importance of place in the story was key as she explored this interest with her classes. Lili stated her response to the author's ability to express his feelings towards Haiti when she acknowledged that even though immigration is not something she has experienced, through the literature and poetry she is able to imagine Laferrière's feelings.

Being able to imagine what it may be like to arrive in a new country is key for teachers in our society with increasingly diverse student populations. On one of my first days at the school, Madame Lili was writing a note to Marisol's parents, and she had asked Madame Mai to translate it into Spanish. Marisol's family had recently moved from Mexico. The small gesture of having a note translated is a way that the teacher recognized the parents' funds of knowledge.

As the teachers shared about their classes, during our discussions, they often spoke about how a large number of children in this context were learning French as a third language. One of the challenges the teachers faced was that many children missed school for long periods when they travelled abroad with their families. They found that the long absences disrupted the flow of learning for children. The parents and families were not often in the school, except for a few volunteers or at special events. There was an open house when parents came to see children share their portfolios, and a Variety Show in the spring. And yet, I wondered about how parents and families could be even more involved, through projects that would foster collaboration between the school and home. In particular, as research in multiliteracies has demonstrated, it could be very beneficial for children and families to read dual-language texts and to create their own identity texts (Cummins, 2001; Naqvi, 2009; Taylor et al., 2008). In this project, I had not involved families and yet the topic often arose.

In the interviews, I asked the teachers about their own experiences of teaching language. Before teaching French as a Second Language in the bilingual program at Garden Meadows, Madame Lili taught in a Francophone school. At Garden Meadows, where the school community is composed of children of diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and ethnic heritage, and many of the children are learning French as an additional language, Madame Lili noted she needed to adapt to the students. She mentioned that her education program at a Francophone university had not included second language education, with the exception of one required course.

When Madame Mai reflected on her early literacy experiences, she did not describe reading experiences, but rather spoke of her childhood memories of learning French at school as an additional language while speaking Chinese at home and attending a Saturday school. She remembers going between two languages and cultures at home and school.

Madame Mai:	<i>Je pense que c'était une période très difficile. Je pense que c'était une période de transition. Je n'étais pas sûre. J'étais toute mélangée. J'étais comme okay, bien, je vais à l'école samedi, mais personne ne le savait.</i>	I think that it was a very difficult period. It was a transitional period. I was not sure. I was confused. I was like, okay, well I go to (Chinese) school on Saturday.
Heather:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Madame Mai:	<i>Tu voulais pas...you wanted to fit in... alors j'étais pas trop sûre ou est-ce que j'étais.</i>	You didn't want to...you wanted to fit in. So I didn't really know where I was.
Heather:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Madame Mai::	<i>Parce que chez nous, c'est une différente culture. A l'école c'est une différente culture. Alors, moi, j'étais un peu les deux.</i>	Because at home we had a different culture. And at school there was a different culture. So, I was a bit of both.
Heather:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Madame Mai:	<i>Je trouvais ça difficile. Puis après, le secondaire c'était plus facile pour moi. Le primaire c'était difficile. Oh, tu es différente, je ne veux pas jouer avec toi, tu sais. Ça fait que, c'était plus difficile au primaire. Le secondaire c'était mieux. On était tous...surtout l'école secondaire ou moi j'étais, c'était...très, très, très multiculturelle, alors une belle expérience.</i>	I found it really hard. Then, high school was easier for me. Elementary school was hard. Oh, you're different, I don't want to play with you. High school was better. We were...especially at the high school where I was it was very, very, very multicultural...so that was a positive experience.

Interview, April 17, 2014

As Madame Mai described her own experiences of attending school and learning French as the language of instruction, she pointed out that she had a desire to be a part of the culture of the school, and yet also to maintain her family's language and culture outside of school. She describes the difficulty in primary school of being made to feel different and sometimes excluded. Attending Chinese language school on Saturday was something that her friends and teachers at school did not know about; she kept it to herself. However, learning French with the support of resource teachers was something that she remembers well.

Madame Mai describes a more positive experience in secondary school when she was in a more culturally diverse school environment, attending an IB program, along with many students of diverse cultural and linguistic heritages. As an elementary teacher working with many students who are learning French as an additional language, Madame Mai views her diverse language experiences and multilingualism as an asset to her career. She was able to find a teaching position first teaching Mandarin in a pilot program at an IB school and eventually teaching French in the bilingual program at Garden Meadows. Working in a multicultural context, such as Garden Meadows, Madame Mai feels a strong connection to her students.

As Madame Lili spoke about how her own teaching had been inspired by the literary works of French Canadian writer Gabrielle Roy, it was clear that she often reflected on her role as an educator and how she impacted the lives of children.

Madame Lili:	<i>Gabrielle Roy, j'ai lu tous les livres de Gabrielle Roy.</i>	Gabrielle Roy, I read all of her books.
Heather:	<i>Ah, oui. J'adore.</i>	Oh, yes. I love her books too.
Madame Lili:	<i>Mon préféré c'est <i>Ces enfants de ma vie</i> c'est tellement beau.</i>	My favourite is <i>Children of My Heart</i> .
Heather:	<i>Ah, oui.</i>	Ah, yes.
Madame Lili:	<i>Rue Deschambault aussi. Gabrielle Roy elle travaillait longtemps comme enseignante.</i>	
Heather:	<i>Oui. C'est intéressant. J'ai lu son autobiographie, <i>La détresse et l'enchantement</i>.</i>	Yes. It's interesting. I read her autobiography, <i>Enchantment and Sorrow</i> .
Madame Lili:	<i>Oh, que c'est beau!</i>	Oh, it's so beautiful.
Heather:	<i>Oui, ça m'inspirait beaucoup.</i>	Yes, it really inspired me.
Madame Lili:	<i>Moi c'est ses livres sur l'éducation qui m'ont beaucoup inspirés. La façon qu'elle abordait des enfants. Puis c'est important quand on fait ce métier-là de se rappeler. Moi je me disais si je veux rester une bonne enseignante je me dis toujours j'ai devant moi la fille et le fils de quelqu'un. Il faut que je fasse attention. Je traite toujours les enfants comme j'aimerais ça que les miennes se fassent traiter.</i>	For me, it's her books on teaching that really inspired me. The way she is towards children. It's important when we are in this profession to remind ourselves. I say to myself that if I want to stay a good teacher I tell myself all the time that I have in front of me the daughter or the son of someone. I need to pay attention. I treat children the way that I would like mine to be treated.

Interview, April 16, 2014

Reflecting on their own teaching and literacy histories contributed to having an awareness of how the literature and language has impacted their own lives, as students and teachers. This time for reflection contributed to thinking about how the texts that we read in the classroom have an impact for the children. For example, when thinking about the texts selected for reading aloud, Madame Lili and Madame Mai were considering the narrative of the story, the quality of the illustrations, and the issues that children may be able to relate to and understand.

TEACHING IN THE MOMENT

MAKING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS TO LITERATURE

Working within the theme of *Children Speaking with Children*, the teachers thought about meaningful ways to engage children with the selected picture books. An important aspect of the classroom read-alouds and the children's responses to the stories was the way in which the teachers fostered children's personal connections to the literature. When the teachers asked questions about the characters in the stories or encouraged the children to think about their own lives, the children became highly engaged in the interactive reading and dialogue surrounding the text.

During our initial literacy planning meeting in March, Madame Mai considered how the text *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant* would connect to the other stories that we would read, such as *Fourchon*. As she read the book, during our planning meeting, she noted that the book *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant* was a way to introduce the topic of respecting differences. Although this text is published in France, it is closely related to the themes of identity and belonging in the Canadian picture books, and served as a starting point to the project.

Madame Mai:

Oh, moi, j'aime celui-là! C'est court. (J'ai le droit d'être un enfant). « J'ai le droit d'être respecté...que je sois noir ou blanc, grand ou petit, riche ou pauvre...» C'est simple. C'est coloré. Même si on ne fait pas dans le thème je peux lire aux élèves.

Oh, I love this one. It's short. (*I Have the Right To Be a Child*) "I have the right to be respected...whether I am black or white, big or small, rich or poor..." It's simple. It's colourful. Even if we don't read it within the theme, I could read it with my class.

Madame Lili:

Ab, oui.

Oh, yes.

Heather:

Je pensais ça pourrait bien aller quand j'arrive...pour expliquer aux enfants pourquoi je suis là.

I was thinking that it could work well for my first day. To explain to the children why I am there.

Madame Mai:

Oh, oui. On pourrait commencer avec lui...on peut parler des différences. Et après pour eux, on peut commencer avec Fourchon, ça fait une belle transition.

Oh, yes. We could start with that. We could talk about differences. And after that for them, start with *Fourchon*. It would make a really nice transition.

Collaborative Literacy meeting, March 26, 2014

When we began with reading the book, *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant*, on my first day in the classrooms in April, we emphasized the importance of each child having rights. The teachers and I were fascinated by the responses of the children, as they each drew a picture of one (or more) of the rights of children. While the children were drawing, the teachers and I circulated in the classroom and interacted with the children. As I began by reading this book on the first day and introducing the drawing activity related to children's rights in the classes, this project started with a focus on the children themselves. We provided an open-ended prompt: draw one of the children's rights that you think is important. The responses of the children were varied, with many drawing pictures of families, playing with friends, going to school, having food to eat, and a warm place to sleep.

As we watched the children drawing and writing about the rights that were important to them, it gave us insight into their interests. Madame Mai noted that some of the children surpassed her expectations in their ability to write independently. Speaking of one of the girls in her Grade One class, Deepa, Madame Mai noted that she had not realized how much she could write in French. Deepa went beyond writing one sentence, to writing several phrases. She wrote, « *J'aime manger les fraises et j'aime ma famille et j'aime l'école et j'aime dessiner et j'aime mes amis. J'ai le droit de manger.* » Deepa's picture depicts her along with her family, and she has divided the drawing into different sections to show various aspects of her personal world.



Figure 35. Deepa's drawing of children's rights from her portfolio.¹⁰

As Madame Mai noted in our literacy planning session, the text *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant* did connect to the story Fourchon. When reading Fourchon, the teachers invited children's responses through conversation following the book read-alouds and then in drawing and writing about the book.

When I asked Madame Mai about whether she felt the children identified with the stories, she noted the connection that Ngozi had made to the books about Vava.

Surtout Ngozi, elle a adoré les livres de Vava. Elle était capable de s'attacher à l'histoire. Un moment donné on avait parlé de La fête des morts je pense, qu'ils portaient pas de souliers. Et quand elle a retourné au Nigeria, elle ne portait pas de souliers non plus.

Epecially Ngozi, she loved the Vava books. She became very attached to the stories. On one occasion we were talking about *La fête des morts*, I think, and they weren't wearing shoes. When she went back to Nigeria, she wasn't wearing shoes either.

Interview, June 2014

¹⁰ Madame Mai included the children's literature response work in their Grade One portfolios. This was a way of documenting the children's work, which they shared with their parents during a parent open house evening in the spring.

Madame Lili^{11 12} modelled for the children by providing her own personal response, giving examples from her own life. In one of her classes she wrote on the board,

Je suis spéciale parce que je suis née très loin d'ici.

I am special because I was born very far away from here

In another of her classes, she wrote the sentence,

Je suis spéciale parce que je suis une maman

I am special because I am a mother .

Both of Madame Lili's examples demonstrated an openness and vulnerability in sharing who she was with her class, a part of her own personal identity that was in response to the text (Palmer, 2007). By being open about who she was as a classroom teacher, Madame Lili was showing the children her own sense of identity related to place and family.

Madame Lili's way of teaching and engaging children's personal responses was organic, natural, and often improvised. From her experience of being in the classroom for nearly 10 years, she has a way of knowing how to engage her students in meaningful ways. In her words, she describes how her teaching is often based on her spontaneity. Her dynamic personality and energy in the classroom is also a reflection of her dedication to teaching and the enjoyment that she finds in interacting with young children.

*Et les enfants ont déjà plein de réponses.
Mais tu as vu quand j'ai fait la lecture du
Fourchon l'autre fois. Je ne suis pas le style
de prof qui est méga préparée non plus. Je
suis très spontanée dans la vie. C'est moi ça.
Quand j'enseigne c'est la même chose. Puis je
me nourris de ce que les enfants me donnent.
Je m'adapte beaucoup aux enfants.*

And the children are so full of responses (to the literature). Well you saw when I read Spork the other day. I am not the kind of teacher who is super planned. I am very spontaneous in life. That's the way I am. When I am teaching it's the same thing. And I find nourishment in what the children give me. I adapt to the children.

Interview, April 16, 2014

¹¹ When I asked her about her example, she shared with me that she had grown up in the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean region of Québec. Being familiar with this area as it is where I studied French when I was a university student on exchange from Alberta, her example of place also provided us with a personal connection related to place.

¹² Acknowledging her role as a mother is something very special for Madame Lili. She often spoke of her daughters when discussing children's literature and teaching.

Madame Lili recognized the funds of knowledge that children bring to the classroom and to reading. Furthermore, her statement « *Je me nourris de ce que les enfants me donnent* » (*I am nourished by what the children give*), points to Madame Lili's philosophy of teaching that is centred on relationality. By adapting to the children, Madame Lili recognizes that their knowledge, voices, and ideas are important. This was evident when the children shared their responses to *Fourchon* by writing their own sentences, and the safety that they felt when doing so in the classroom. In this way the nourishing was reciprocal.

When the children showed Madame Lili their responses to the book, she was curious to see their words and images. For example, Rukshana, smiling proudly, walked over to her teacher with her paper to show her work (Figure 36). Madame Lili read Rukshana's sentence aloud in French and was nearly brought to tears of joy as she was so moved by Rukshana's powerful words, « *Je suis spéciale parce que ma famille m'aime* ». Madame Lili exclaimed that she would go very far in life knowing that her family loved her. She encouraged Rukshana's personal statement. Rukshana's smile grew bigger. When Madame Lili looked up she said that she only hoped her own daughters would feel the same way. This conversation, in response to the story, opened up a topic that is personal, and not often discussed in classrooms: love. The emotion and energy in the classroom reminded me how making a personal connection to a story, and sharing that with others, creates meaningful interactions. These are the powerful moments of teaching that one cannot plan for, as they occur in the moment. Furthermore, this is an example of the teacher encouraging her students to be "strong poets" as they tell their own stories.

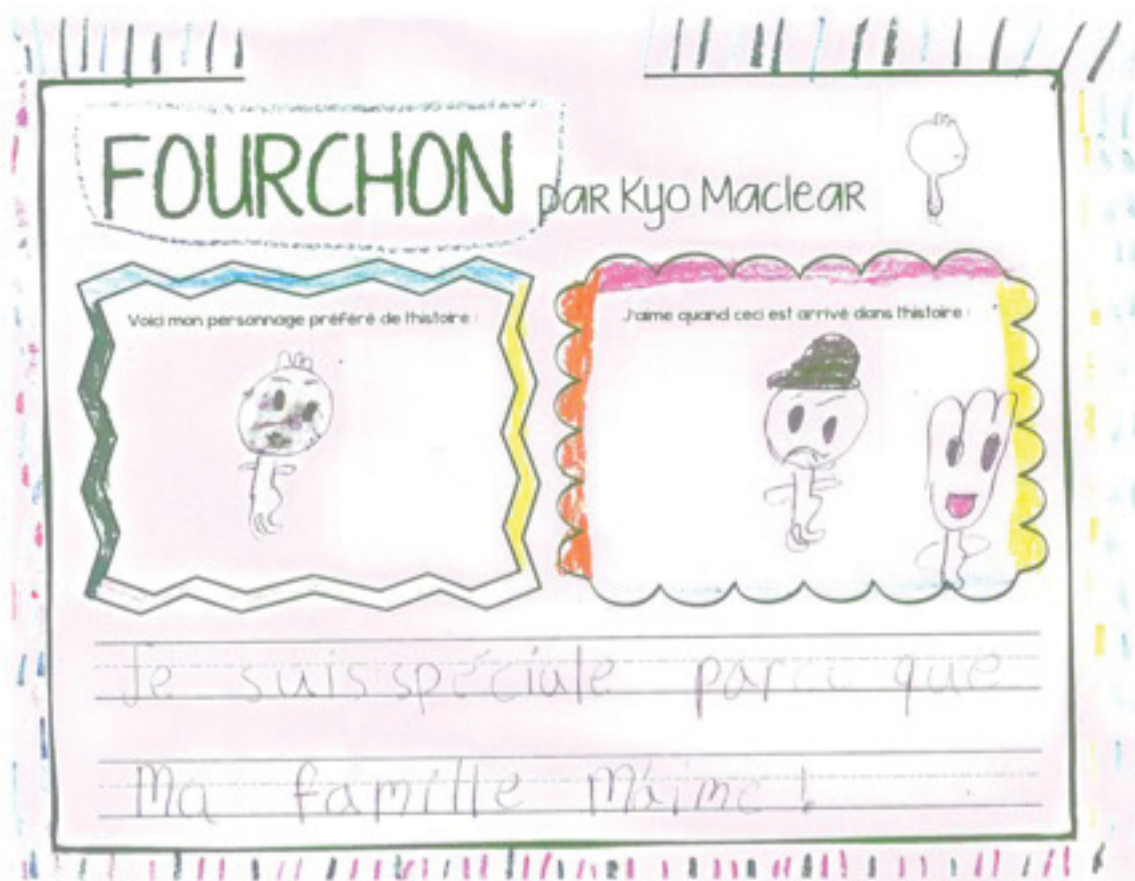


Figure 36. Rukshana's response to *Fourchon*.

Being open to the children's responses to literature, as Madame Lili noted, requires having spontaneity.

Je suis très spontanée dans la vie. Quand j'enseigne c'est la même chose

I'm very spontaneous in life. When I teach it's the same thing.

Teacher interview, April 16, 2014

Her spontaneity was evident in the way that she interacted with children, encouraging their responses to the picture books. As noted by educational researchers, effective teaching is often about the way in which teachers connect with students (Palmer; Sipe, 2008).

NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITY OF PICTURE BOOKS WITH CHILDREN

This category refers to teachers supporting children in engaging deeply with the complexity of texts. Sumara (2002) has described how complexity theory “asks reader-response researchers to consider small events of reading as productive sites of inquiry,” (p. 277). In other words, by looking closely at children and teachers interacting with texts, in the context of one classroom, we can gain insight into the reading experiences of children.

CHILDREN ARE CAPABLE READERS

A key aspect of reading the complexity of literature is to believe that children are capable. When the children in Madame Mai’s Grade One class were reading Dany Laferrière’s books *Je suis fou de Vava* and *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, both she and I noted that many of the children became very connected to the characters and the texts. Their interest in the books by this author led to Madame Mai’s decision to read one more book that we had not planned for initially, *La fête des morts*. Madame Mai listened to the request of the children in her class to read this book. It was while we were working on a large collaborative drawing mural that two of the boys, Julian and Jayden, noticed the images of the trilogy of children’s books by Laferrière, and asked if we would read this one too.

The theme of this story is based around the traditional Voodoo celebrations in Haiti of *Fet gede*¹³. One of the universal themes of the text is the memory and connection that we have to those we love, and to the past. Madame Mai prefaced the reading of *La fête des morts* to her Grade One class by explaining that since students had found that there were three books by the author, we were reading one more. She told her class, “*This one is a bit different, it’s a bit sad. La fête des morts is a day when you celebrate people who died, people who passed away,*” to which one the girls, Lucinda, replied, “*That’s really sad*” (Fieldnotes, June 2014).

¹³ *Fet gede* is celebrated in Haiti on November 2 when people visit the cemetery to honour the souls who have passed away, wearing costumes and bringing flowers and music. This tradition is part of Voodoo practice and is similar to *El día de los muertos* on November 2 in Mexico (Heaven, 2005).

The children's reading of this text would not have been the same if they had not previously read *Le baiser mauve de Vava* and *Je suis fou de Vava*. Their familiarity with the stories, both the words and images, enabled them to recognize the characters and setting. *La fête des morts* begins with a two-page layout that shows the green rolling hills of Petit-Goâve, Haiti, with colourful houses spread out across the landscape. There are various flowers, plants, and trees up on the hilltop cemetery. From reading the previous stories, the children were familiar with the setting of Haiti, and the teacher encouraged them to make that connection by showing this two-page spread and asking them what they recognized in the image.

Madame Mai:	<i>Qu'est-ce que tu reconnais?</i>	What do you recognize in the picture?
Gabrielle:	The bird.	The bird.
Madame Mai:	<i>L'oiseau noir.</i> He comes back in the story.	The black bird. He comes back in the story.
Gabrielle:	I notice they put so much detail.	I notice they put so much detail.
Lucinda:	The graveyard.	The graveyard.
Madame Mai:	<i>Oh, très bien, tu as des bons yeux, Lucinda.</i>	Oh, that is very good Lucinda. You have good eyes.
Deepa:	<i>Les roses.</i>	Roses.

Fieldnotes, June 2014

Gabrielle noted that the *oiseau noir*, the black bird, appeared in all of the stories by Dany Laferrière, as Madame Mai told the class. Lucinda and Deepa noticed that there were some features in the image, such as the cemetery and the roses. These images foreshadowed some of the events in the story. By taking the time to examine the first page, Madame Mai enabled her class to situate themselves in the context of the book by drawing on their previous reading and life experiences. Here, she was encouraging them to develop their visual literacy.

A powerful example of the images and words that children responded to below is an image from the text *La fête des morts* (Laferrière) in which the young boy is sitting at the shore with two of

his friends and watching the fishermen and boats in Petit-Goâve, Haiti. Looking out towards the sunset on the horizon, Vieux-Os declared that he would like to fly away one day, like the bird in the sky. When his friend Rico asked why he would leave: « *Tu n'aimes plus ici?* » (*You don't like it here anymore?*), Vieux-Os declared, « *C'est mon destin, Rico.* » (*It's my destiny, Rico*).

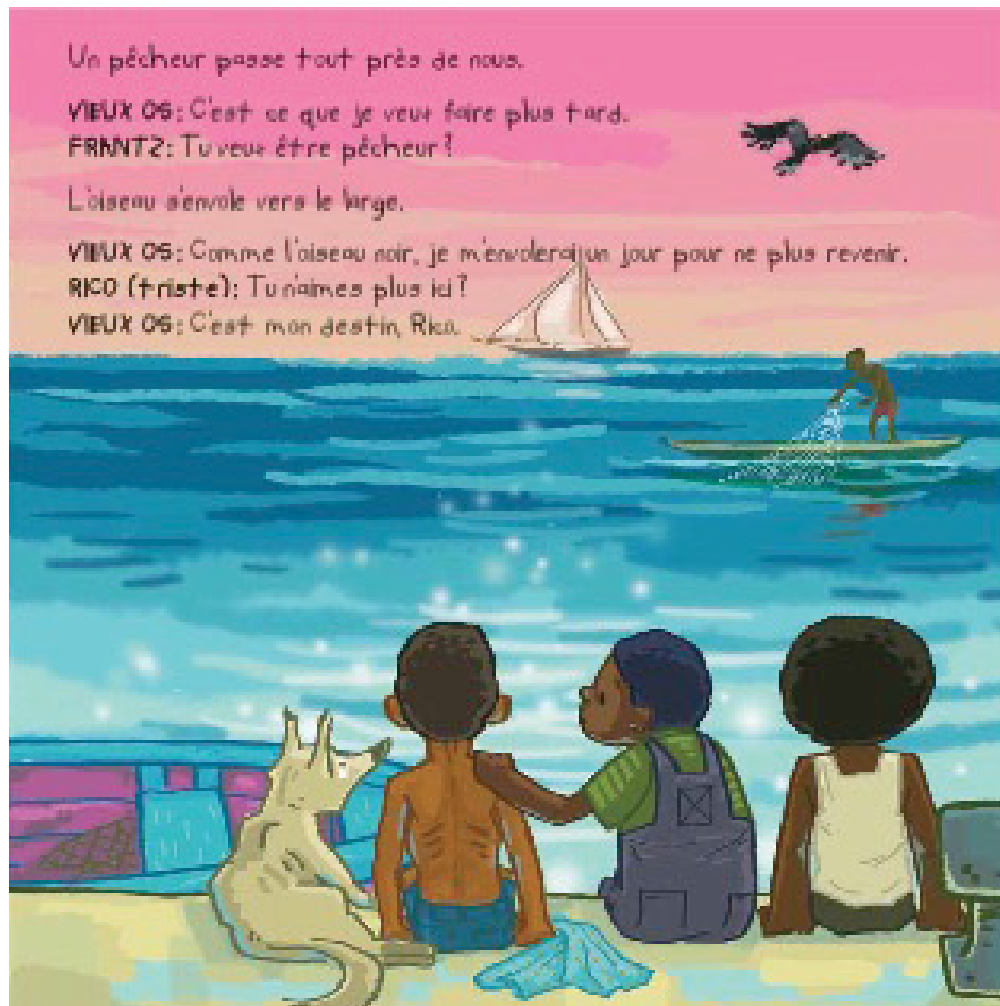


Figure 37. *Vieux-Os and his friends in Petit-Goâve, Haiti.*¹⁴

While reading this book to Madame Mai's Grade One students, this part of the story sparked the interest of Julian (who had requested that his teacher read the book). At that point in the story, Julian said to the class, "*By the way guys, destiny means what you **believe***" (Fieldnotes, June 5, 2014).

¹⁴ Image from *La fête des morts* by Dany Laferrière and Frédéric Normandin. Illustrations © 2010 Frédéric Normandin. Reprinted with permission of Les Éditions de la Bagnole.

Julian's spontaneous statement to the class was heartfelt, as though he could relate to the character's desire to follow his destiny. Julian himself is a writer and had written many books at home. The following year, when I visited the school as a volunteer he told me that he was working on new series of books.

Later on, Madame Mai remarked on the character in the story, speaking of him as though he had become a friend who she admired,

*Puis là, il y a Vieux-Os, qui, c'est un poète.
Tu sais. Il veut partir. Il veut voyager. Il
ne veut pas juste rester là.*

And there's Vieux-Os, the poet. You know, he wants to go. He wants to travel. He doesn't just want to stay there .

Interview, June 2014

For the children, such as Julian, and the teachers, Vieux-Os had entered their hearts and imagination. In the class, we talked about how the author, Laferrière, had moved to Montréal to become a writer.

Through Madame Mai's questions while reading, as well as her translation of some phrases to English, she supported and scaffolded the children's understanding of the text. Furthermore, through the conversations that emerged during the read-aloud, she also listened to the children's responses and validated *their* words. The conversation among the students and teacher illustrated the ways that they were co-constructing meaning.

By listening attentively to the children's responses and engaging in a conversation with the class, the teachers sometimes spent longer reading a story than they would have planned. This is also a way of allowing time to explore complex issues. Madame Mai was surprised at the time that she spent reading some of the books, much longer than usual. For example, when we read *La fête des morts*, the reading and conversation took nearly the entire class period due to the pauses, questions, and extended discussion. Although she had planned to have the children decorate masks like the ones worn in the story, there was not time, and so that was moved to another period.

More time with picture books allows more time for children to interpret and explore meaning in the illustrations and words of the text. Reading books by the same authors, over time, enabled the children to become so familiar with the books that they almost became like old friends. At the end of

a story read aloud, they were asking for more. Even after reading the trilogy by Dany Laferrière, one of the boys in Madame Mai's Grade One class asked me if there would be a fourth book in the series. This was in part because of the animated and caring way in which the teachers read from the stories and created a safe space for conversations. In our interview at the end of the school year, Madame Mai shared that she appreciated reading these books with such vibrant illustrations and rich text. She was impressed with the level of discussion of the Grade One children.

Madame Mai:	<i>J'ai vraiment aimé les trois livres de Vava. Les illustrations colorées. Les détails.</i>	I really liked the three books about Vava. The colourful illustrations. The details.
Heather:	<i>Oui. On ne savait pas si on allait lire La fête des morts. Mais les enfants ont demandé...</i>	Yes. We didn't know that we would read <i>La fête des morts</i> . But the children asked to read it...
Madame Mai:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Heather:	<i>Et je pense que ça a très bien été avec les enfants.</i>	I think it went well with the children.
Madame Mai:	<i>Une belle discussion. Pour les élèves de sept ans ils étaient très matures.</i>	A rich discussion. For children who are seven years old they were very mature.

Interview, June 2014

When reflecting on the children's responses to the picture books, Madame Lili also shared that she had noticed that children were very capable of understanding the complexities of the picture books that engaged their interests as readers. Discussing Dany Laferrière's *Je suis fou de Vava*, she noted,

<i>C'est très bien écrit. Ça veut dire que tu n'a pas besoin de petit livres simplés pour les enfants. Ils sont capables de comprendre si tu donnes un petit plus de chair autour de l'os.</i>	It's so well written. That shows that you don't need to read simple books for children. They are capable of understanding if you give them something with a little bit more substance.
--	--

Interview, June 2014

The teachers were willing to try and read books that were new to them, and were curious about how the children would respond. As such, the teachers were willing to learn along with the children. However, reading contemporary picture books is not necessarily simple or easy. The combination of words and images is complex and demanding. As Madame Lili pointed out, the texts could also be very challenging. For example, she described how the picture book *Virginia Wolf* was very nuanced and implicit.

Oui. Puis c'est beaucoup sous-entendu. Il faut que tu comprennes le sens... C'est pas évident. Si tu regardes ici, un loup, la bouche ouverte en robe, avec les cupcakes. C'est vraiment beau. Mais c'est plus poétique.

There's a lot of subtlety in the text. You need to understand the meaning and it's not easy. If you look here, there is a wolf, her mouth wide open wearing a dress, and cupcakes. It's really beautiful. But it's more poetic.

Interview, June 2014

As a way of helping her students to focus on the meaning of the story *Virginia Wolf*, Madame Lili encouraged them to look at the opposite words in the book, as the story has both lightness and dark. Viewing the book trailer created by Isabelle Arsenault and Kyo Maclear also enhanced the children's understanding of the story's theme. Furthermore, the book trailer showed the children how the artist created the illustrations.

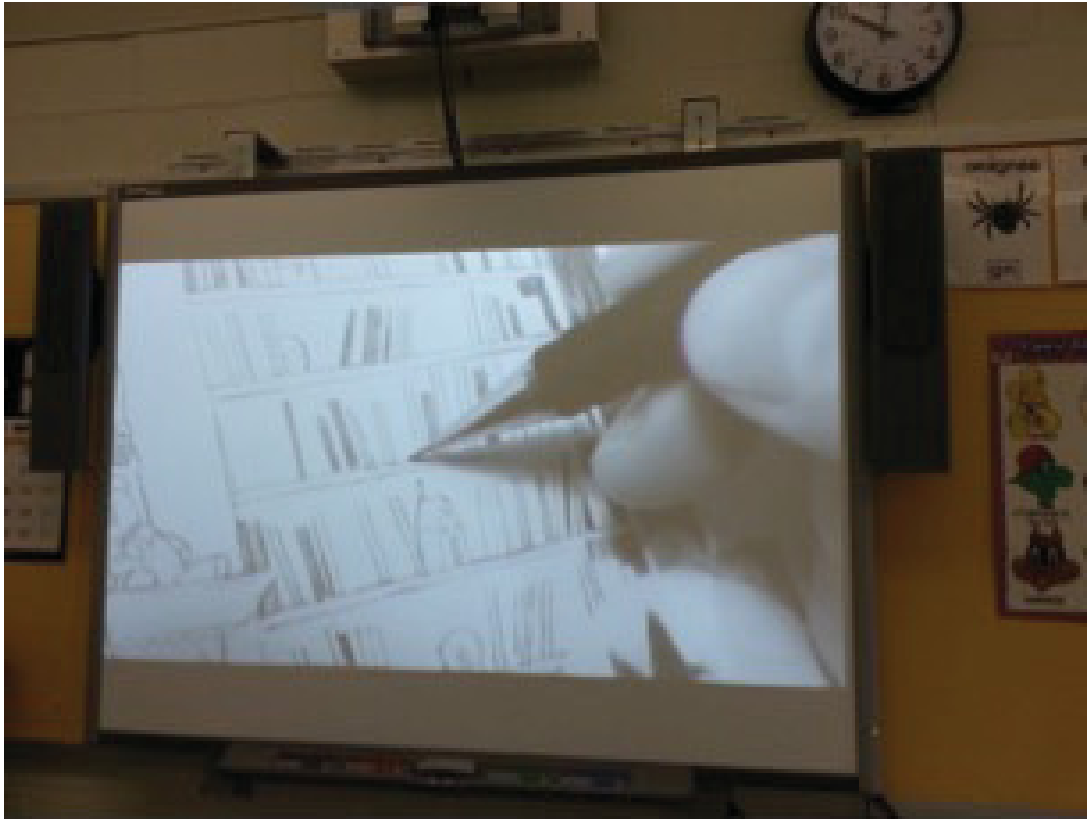


Figure 38. Watching the book trailer of Virginia Woolf in Grade Two.

One of the tensions that arose in the research regarding the complexity of the picture books is teaching difficult topics, such as death. Furthermore, as Madame Lili noted, teachers may choose to teach texts with topics they feel comfortable talking about in the classroom. This relates to the notion of considering the texts that are selected for reading with children (Strong-Wilson, 2008). Therefore, even if children are capable of understanding complex issues, the teachers play an important role in deciding the topics and themes.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ethics and Religious Culture is part of the Québec curriculum.

Madame Lili:	<i>J'ai beaucoup aimé ces livres-là. Ceux j'ai préféré c'est ceux de Dany Laferrière... J'ai pas pris celui sur les morts. Celui-là je l'ai pas pris...c'est peut-être les thèmes que tu es la plus à l'aise. Moi, parler de la mort, j'étais comme ohh.</i>	I really liked the books. The ones I appreciated the most were those by Dany Laferrière. I didn't read the one about dying. That one I didn't take up... maybe it's the themes that you are the most comfortable with. For me, talking about death, I was like ooohhh.
Heather:	<i>C'est plus difficile. C'est un sujet sensible.</i>	Ok. It's difficult. It's a more sensitive subject.
Madame Lili:	<i>Moi, j'ai comme jamais envie que les enfants me posent des questions sur la religion parce que c'est pas ma tasse de thé.</i>	I don't really want children to ask me questions about religion. That's not my cup of tea.
Heather:	<i>Ok, oui. La religion c'est enseigné en anglais, ou la religion et éthique?</i>	Ok. Is religion taught in English?
Madame Lili:	<i>En fait, techniquement, c'est plus enseigné.</i>	Actually, it's not really taught anymore.
Heather:	<i>Je veux dire le cours d'éthique.</i>	Or, I mean the ethics course?
Madame Lili:	<i>Oui, normalement c'est le professeur d'anglais qui font éthique religieuse ou je ne sais pas quoi.</i>	Yes, normally, it's supposed to be the English teacher who teaches ethics or whatever it is called.
Heather:	<i>Oh, c'est en anglais.</i>	Oh, it's in English.
Madame Lili:	<i>Oui. C'est rendu très vague là. Parce qu'avant la religion c'est comme tout le monde, c'est l'affaire de tout le monde. Et maintenant c'est rendu très personnelle. Les parents, c'est à eux de donner ça à leurs enfants et je ne suis pas à l'aise de parler des questions.</i>	It's become very vague...it used to be that religion was public, it was everyone's affair. Now it's become very private. It's up to parents to give that to their children. I am not really comfortable talking about questions (related to religion).

Interview, June 2014

The varied responses of the teachers to the same book demonstrate that teachers play a role in deciding what topics they feel comfortable approaching in the classroom, which relates to engagement with complex issues and difficult knowledge (Robertson, 1997).

FOSTERING A DEEP ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERATURE

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Responding to literature in the classroom requires creating the space that nurtures children's deep engagements with literature (Möller & Allen, 2000; Sumara, 2002). In the early childhood philosophy of Reggio Emilia, the environment is considered as a "third teacher". The placement of books and literacy materials in a classroom library for children's exploration, creativity, and play is central to their learning and imaginative development. Each teacher had a unique approach to providing a literacy-rich environment and fostering a love of reading. Möller and Allen (2000) observe that just as literature can serve as an "important catalyst", the space created by children and adults reading together is of equal importance in the act of responding to texts (p. 173). Within that space that is created, rich opportunities emerge for learning.

In Madame Lili's Grade Two classroom, bins of books lined her bookshelves. The classroom collection of books included a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books in French for children to select for their own individual reading. There was a scheduled time for silent reading included each day in the Grade Two room, following the lunch period. On my first day with the students, I noticed the way that this was a special time in the day for the class as the children could choose what they were reading, and it was very quiet.

In the afternoon, in the Grade Two classroom, classical music is playing softly with an image of the ocean on the Smartboard. The children are reading silently. C'est tranquil. They have selected books from bins in the classroom. There is a calm and peaceful atmosphere in the classroom. After reading, the children help with organizing the bins of books on the bookshelves. (Fieldnotes, April 2, 2014)

The Grade One classroom library and reading area (Figure 39) is a very cozy place that Madame Mai created with care and attention to detail. The bins of books were labeled in French according to categories, such as dinosaurs, or the author's name, such as Robert Munsch, or series of books, such as Franklin (Benjamin). In the photo below, the yellow poster by the chair is one

that I made with pictures of the author Kyo Maclear and illustrator Isabelle Arsenault. Madame Mai included this poster in her literacy area to introduce the creators of the book.



Figure 39. Grade One reading area.

The children were encouraged to become independent and confident listeners, speakers, readers, writers, and creators in the classroom through a variety of literacies. In the Grade One classroom, the *Murale de mots* included words that were frequently used for Grade One writing. The white board (Figure 40) was also used to display the daily timetable (with words and images) and to write messages or ideas that children had in response to the stories.



Figure 40: Grade One classroom literacy displays.



Figure 41: Grade Two classroom display of mural drawing by children.

EXPLORING NEW PERSPECTIVES THROUGH VISUAL LITERACY

The Grade Two teacher, Madame Lili, was interested in exploring different books by various Haitian authors to read during the month of May and to make available for her students. I brought a variety of books including *L'oranger magique*, *Huit jours: un enfant à Haïti* and the poetry collection *Haïti mon pays*. Madame Lili was also excited and curious to see a copy of *Je suis fou de Vava* translated into Haitian Creole (*Kreyòl*) as *Mwen damou pou Vava*. We presented this to the children and explained that the book was written in one of the languages spoken in Haiti.

An important aspect of the classroom environment that fostered children's engagements with stories was the space to respond through visual arts, as I have explored in Chapter Five. Importantly, the teachers played a significant role in creating the space for such creative and artistic engagement. In my fieldnotes below, I describe how we worked together, in Grade One, to draw a mural in response to the book *Le baiser mauve de Vava*,

Madame Mai had spread out a large white roll of paper at the back of the classroom for the mural. She painted lines for the background sky, land, and water. The children gathered around the paper, sitting on the floor all around the paper. Madame Mai showed the class the scene from the book they were recreating, the first double-spread of Petit-Goâve with the children playing outside in Haiti. Madame Mai and I also joined in the drawing with the Grade One class. Deepa started writing words on the mural beside her drawing in English, and I helped her to write some words in French. Les poissons. Amour. Ameer had finished drawing and was examining the book, finding details and coming over to show me the pictures. (Fieldnotes, May 30)

The books that we read in the project were also made available for the children to read independently. Madame Mai placed the books in one of the white bins in the reading area, where they were readily accessible for the children. In our interview in June, she told me that the books had become popular choices among the students in her classes during independent reading time. This was something that she observed—that the children had developed new interests and reading habits during the project.

Heather:	<i>Est-ce que tu as remarqué un changement dans ta classe ou quelque chose qui a changé un peu avec une histoire...?</i>	Did you notice any changes in your class or anything that changed after reading a story?
Madame Mai:	<i>Mmmhmm. Moi, je pense c'est plutôt l'habitude. Le matin quand ils rentrent on fait dix minutes de la lecture silencieuse avant de commencer la journée.</i>	Mmmhmm. I think that it was really the habits. In the morning when they arrive we have 10 minutes of silent reading before we start the day.
Heather:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Madame Mai:	<i>J'avais préparé un panier pour tes livres.</i>	I had prepared a bin with your books.
Heather:	<i>Ah, oui.</i>	Ah, yes.
Madame Mai:	<i>Mais le panier blanc. Les élèves ils ont commencé à demander à la place de prendre le livre dans mon panier, de prendre un livre de ton panier.</i>	Well, the white bin. Instead of taking a book to read from my bins they started to take a book from your bin.
Heather:	<i>Oh, je ne savais pas..</i>	Oh, I didn't know that!
Madame Mai:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Heather:	<i>Oh. C'est intéressant. C'étaient quels livres?</i>	That's interesting. What books did they choose?
Madame Mai:	<i>C'étaient tout. Tous les livres. N'importe quel qui était disponible.</i>	All of them! Any of the books that were available.
Heather:	<i>Okay.</i>	Okay.
Madame Mai:	<i>Puis il y avaient quelques élèves qui ont demandé s'ils pouvaient les emprunter et puis les retourner!</i>	And the students asked if they could borrow the books and bring them back!

Interview, June 2014

Having access to the books in the classroom played a central role in children reading for pleasure.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The care that the teachers took to listen to children during their time reading and responding to the literature made the children feel respected, valued, and loved. As Lerona noted about her Grade Two teacher reading aloud, “*It makes you feel special*” (Focus group, June 2014). Through their attentive listening in the classroom, and by providing multiple ways to respond to literature, the teachers made a difference for the children in their Grades One and Two classes.

LOVE OF TEACHING

Goldstein (1998) writes that “love for children is both an emotional and an intellectual act, and as such forms a foundation on which to base an early childhood curriculum” (p. 28). Madame Mai described her own love of teaching,

*Au début, je savais pas que je voulais enseigner... au CEGEP j'étais supposée d'aller en sciences. C'est pas ma personnalité. J'ai commencé à faire du tutorat... dans le sous-sol. Ça s'appelait le Café Centre d'aide français. J'ai fait ça pendant un an et j'adorais ça... ça me donnait une nouvelle ouverture. J'étais bonne en sciences, mais je me voyais pas faire ça pour le reste de ma vie. Mais je suis vraiment tombée en amour avec l'enseignement. Je trouve que tu peux partager tes connaissances puis tu essaies de faire un effet positif sur l'autre. **Puis tu fais une différence!***

At first, I didn't know that I wanted to teach... at CEGEP, I was supposed to go into sciences. It wasn't well-suited to my personality. I started tutoring... in the basement. It was called the French Café. I did that for a year and I loved it... that opened new doors for me. I was good in science, but I didn't see myself doing that for the rest of my life. But I really fell in love with teaching. I find that you can share your knowledge and have a positive effect on others. **And you make a difference!**

Interview, April 17, 2014

Central to listening is openness to encounters with the children in the classroom (Davies, 2014). By listening to the children's responses to literature, the teachers encouraged the children to express themselves with their “hundred languages”. Drawing on the philosophy of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006), Davies (2014) writes,

Opening up the not-yet-known through dialogue, and through the careful listening that is involved in keeping meaning open, relies...on recognition of the “one hundred languages” that we share with children...Rinaldi argues that children are extraordinary listeners—and that we, as adults, can learn from them how to engage in reciprocal listening. (p. 12)

As noted by Neilsen Glenn (2010), “We seldom talk of heart in education, or of spirit, for that matter. But listening with the ear of the heart is an act of the spirit that can reconnect us” (para. 17), and this is evident in the way Madame Lili and Madame Mai connected with their students when listening to their responses to literature.

COURAGE

The teachers I worked with had the courage to try new approaches to literacy with the children. For Madame Lili, trying new things and being flexible is central to the way that she teaches.

Ça prend de l'humilité. Parce que des fois ça ne donne pas du tout le résultat que tu veux. Il faut que tu fasses, bon là-dessus j'ai manqué quelque chose. On va l'enlever. On va faire d'autre chose. Puis, c'est ça. J'ai pas peur vraiment.

It takes humility. Because sometimes you don't get the result that you expected. You need to think about what you have missed. We'll take something out. We'll do something else. That's it. I am not afraid.

Interview, April 16, 2014

Madame Lili's openness to trying and exploring new ideas and stories in her classroom was an important part of her professional teacher identity.

I did see the courage that Madame Lili had to try new pedagogical approaches in her classroom. She was open to challenges. In the early stages of the project, Madame Lili mentioned that she preferred to read realistic stories, and that she did not find the children could understand more poetic texts.

À ce niveau ici, des fois ça m'est arrivé de prendre les livres ou c'était un peu poétique puis ça marche pas avec les petits parce qu'ils saisissent pas les subtilités. Il faut aller avec les histoires vraiment réalistes. Comme l'histoire de Vava ça va marcher, c'est sûr parce que les enfants vont comprendre. Les mots qui sont utilisés sont bons. Les images sont belles. Ils vont embarquer dans l'histoire.

At this level, sometimes I have read books that are more poetic and it didn't work with the young children because they don't grasp the subtleties of the text. You need to go with realistic stories. Like the story about Vava, that will work for sure, because the children will understand. The words are good. The illustrations are beautiful. They will really get into this story.

Interview, April 16, 2014

In *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, Vieux-Os writes poetry to express his feelings. There are poems throughout the text. Madame Lili decided to write poetry with her class! She came up with her ideas about how to bring in French words and put them in a box and then have the class write a poem together in French. The children were delighted. Each child illustrated the poem, and added one sentence at the end. This was an activity that many of the students enjoyed, including Rukshana who I wrote about in Chapter Five (she loved the poetry in *Le baiser mauve de Vava*). I gathered all of the poems from both of Madame Lili's classes and made copies of a book for her and for the school principal.

RESPECT FOR CHILDREN

By listening to the children's responses to the literature, the teachers showed a respect for the children's voices. After rereading *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant* with her class, and following the activities in response to the book Fourchon, Madame Mai commented that the children were aware of the differences and that she was proud of them.

Ils savent qu'ils sont différents et ils ne veulent pas être pareils. Qu'est-ce qui est bien qu'ils ne veulent pas être pareils!

They know that they are different and they don't want to be alike. That's a good thing that they don't want to be the same!

Interview, April 17, 2014

In the reading of *La fête des morts*, Madame Mai showed a way of listening respectfully to the children's voices. She was aware that two of the children in her class had recently experienced the loss of a family member. She respectfully guided the children in the conversation and interpretation of the images. Her gentle tone of voice and attentive listening showed the children that she cared about what they had to say. This was the point where Ngozi recognized some familiarity in the book with her knowledge of the funeral practices in Nigeria.

Madame Mai: Do you know what a funeral is?

Ngozi: In Africa, there's music and four people.

While they continued the discussion, Ngozi shared more about her cultural knowledge.

Ngozi: Jealousy can kill you; that comes from my language (Nigeria).

Madame Mai: You know what, that's true! Jealousy can really hurt you inside.

Fieldnotes, Grade One, June 2014

DISCUSSION

The presence of contemporary Canadian picture books in the classroom environment of these Grade One and Two classes brought a “*new dimension*” to the classroom (Madame Mai, teacher interview, April 2014). By engaging with the stories through reading, drawing, writing, dancing, painting, and talking, the children and teachers shared passionately in the journey. Greene (1995) writes, “Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light” (1995, p. 133). There is potential for teachers and children to learn from listening to one another through deep engagements with literature.

The teachers' engagements with literature for pleasure and the sharing of their literacy histories were central to the way they engaged children with reading. For instance, Madame Lili described her aesthetic enjoyment of Dany Laferrière's writing, and then showed her enthusiasm for reading his texts with her classes. Interestingly, she noted how she herself could imagine herself in the book *L'engigme du retour*. Madame Lili's enthusiasm and openness to imagining through literature

played a central role in the way she read and encouraged children to imagine in her classroom.

Madame Lili mentioned that she would often base her teaching around the way the children responded to the texts noting,

Les enfants ont déjà plein de réponses.

The children are so full of responses

Interview, April 2014

When she listened to their responses to *Fourchon* and other stories, she learned more about their personalities and interests. Genishi and Dyson (2009) note,

...the importance of educators' learning about each child as a person whose social sense and knowledge resources come from a diversity of involvements as a friend, a family member, and a participant in community and popular cultures. In this way, they are more likely to understand and build on children's meanings. (p. 19)

Teachers' knowledge of children's literature is important as it contributes to their selections of texts and the way they engage children in reading beyond simply decoding text (Cremin, Bearne, Mottram, & Goodwin, 2008). Madame Lili pointed out that some of the texts, such *Virginia Wolf*, she found to be more challenging for the children. As she noted,

C'est beaucoup sous-entendu... C'est pas évident... C'est vraiment beau. Mais c'est plus poétique.

There's a lot of subtlety in the text. It's not easy. It's really beautiful. But it's more poetic

Interview, June 2014

This text is sophisticated in the way it is created. There seems to be a tension regarding how to engage children with poetic texts, as Madame Lili had noted earlier in April,

À ce niveau ici, des fois ça m'est arrivé de prendre les livres ou c'était un peu poétique puis ça marche pas avec les petits parce qu'ils saisissent pas les subtilités.

At this level, sometimes I have read books that are more poetic and it didn't work with the young children because they don't grasp the subtleties of the text.

Interview, April 2014

One of the issues that this raises is how to engage children with poetic texts. Interestingly, both of the teachers engaged their children with the poetry in *Le baiser mauve de Vava*.

Cremin et al. (2008) have studied teachers' reading habits and knowledge of children's literature and how they make decisions about texts to use in the classroom. Their study of 1,200 primary teachers in the UK indicated that "with regard to teachers' knowledge of fiction, authors, poets, and picture book creators, suggests that their breadth of knowledge is limited, and that they are drawing upon a very narrow range for use in the classroom" (p. 15).

Unfortunately, anxieties about the technicalities of poetry appear to affect teachers and pupils from generation to generation despite the fact that most young children are responsive to musical language and that poetry can readily be linked to a love of nursery rhymes and playground rhymes. (Arizpe, Styles, & Rokison, 2010, p. 134)

One of the tensions raised in this chapter is the challenge of approaching difficult topics through literature (Möller & Allen, 2000; Robertson, 1997; Salisbury & Styles, 2012). Möller and Allen (2000) write of the challenges of reading texts that raise emotional issues, such as racism, in their discussion of children reading *The Friendship* (a novel): "In the role of the teacher, she could not promise protection from harm, though she desperately wished she could. It seemed a fine line between offering comfort while not denying the harsh realities of the world" (p. 160). Salisbury and Styles (2012) emphasize that children's book authors and illustrators often write about difficult topics, and there are a range of books available. One example they describe is a book by award-winning UK author Michael Rosen (2004), *The Sad Book*, a touching story that sensitively addresses the death of the author's teenage son. How may teachers be supported in reading such stories?

Through extended explorations of contemporary picture books, and their own imaginations, the children expressed their inner feelings. By encouraging the children to listen with the heart, the teachers showed the children that their ideas were important and valued (Paley, 1997). Furthermore, Madame Mai remarked on the intercultural aspect of the stories and the opportunity for children to learn through the children's voices in the texts.

Je pense que ça apportait une nouvelle dimension dans la classe. Surtout pour les élèves qui ne connaissaient pas la culture haïtienne ou la culture japonaise. Ils ont appris quelque chose de nouveau, alors c'est bien.

I think that it (the stories) brought a new dimension to the class. Especially for children who weren't familiar with Haitian culture or Japanese culture. They learned something new and that's good.

Interview, June 2014

Given the increasing cultural, religious, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in Canadian classrooms, there is a need to further consider ways teachers and children engage with social justice issues and human rights education (Chambers, 2003; Johnston, 2006). As noted by Cremin et al. (2008), "since research indicates the minimal use of global literature in the classroom, children from cultural or linguistic minority groups may well be marginalized unless teachers' own reading repertoires can be urgently expanded" (p. 19). Madame Lili's engagement and familiarity with Laferrière's writing had an impact on her enthusiasm for selecting his texts in the classroom. Madame Mai noted that she did not have very much time to read for pleasure due to her schedule of teaching and studying full time, although she did take the time to read and enjoy the children's books,

Ça me donne des nouvelles idées parce que je ne connais pas Virginia Wolf. Je ne connais pas Fourchon.

It gives me new ideas because I don't know *Virginia Wolf*. I don't know *Fourchon*.

Interview, April 2014

If teachers explore different texts in a variety of genres, what possibilities would become available for young readers?

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed the role of the teacher in listening to children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books. The teachers' engagement with literature and respect for children was key in the ways they engaged children in navigating the complexity of the texts. As Palmer (2007) suggests, there is not one method or strategy for teaching, but rather it is more important for teachers to know their selfhood and to "weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves" (p. 11). In the next chapter, **We're All Part of the Story**, I explore the ways that reading contemporary literature contributed to building community among the children and teachers in these diverse primary classrooms.

‘WE’RE ALL PART OF THE STORY’: CHILDREN AND TEACHERS AT PLAY

Practices of mindfulness, such as the close reading of a literary text, can assist human subjects to learn how to create loving attachments to ideas, to landscapes, to practices, and to people.

Sumara, 2002, p. xvii

INTRODUCTION

Thirty-three years ago, Donald Graves (1983), published his groundbreaking book on whole language teaching, *Writing: Children and Teachers at Work*. His work emphasized the ways that children find pleasure in the writing process by working with teachers who believe that children are capable. Graves (1983) poignantly describes how schools too often “ignore the child’s urge to show what he knows...instead we take control away from children and place unnecessary road blocks in the way of their intentions” (p. 1). Graves focused on how children become confident writers who enjoy the process as they work alongside attentive teachers who provide mentorship in the craft of writing. The concept of listening to children’s voices and encouraging them to express their voices has increasingly become an important concern for childhood studies researchers interested in children’s

literacy practices, such as Vivian Paley, Anne Dyson Haas, and others, and has also provided a framework for this study, as I have stated earlier in this thesis.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which children and teachers create a sense of community in the classroom through the shared experience of reading and responding to contemporary Canadian picture books. Curriculum scholar Hasebe-Ludt (1999) argues,

We need to strive to come together with/in differences to establish community without losing individual voices, remind ourselves of the force of language in making sense of the world and of all the universe through meaningful multicultural language and texts. (p. 49)

I am drawing on Hasebe-Ludt's (1999) notion of community as a way that children and teachers come together through stories, particularly visual literature. The aesthetic experience of reading and responding to the art and words of the picture books allows for children and teachers to collectively consider the possibilities of *being* together in the world (Greene, 1995; Hasebe-Ludt, 1999; Neilsen Glenn, 2010; Smits & Naqvi, 2014). As Paulo Freire suggests, education should provide opportunities for children to learn to *read the world* as well as the word (see Hasebe-Ludt, 1999). Interaction and relationality are key elements to being a part of the classroom community.

As I have mentioned in the introductory chapter to this study, Canadian classrooms are among the most diverse in the world (Chambers, 2003). Within the classrooms of this study, teachers and children created their own communities through their daily interactions. As the children and teachers shared the common location of the classrooms, and since they had already lived through many experiences together in the school year before I arrived, the sense of community was already there. "A sense of community develops when people share a common location, experience, characteristic or purpose" (Disch, 2003, p. 179) and respect each other's differences. Interaction is essential to creating "community", and a sense of safety, connection and acceptance" (Lenette, Weston, Wise, Sunderland, & Bristed, 2016, p. 11). I was interested in exploring how engaging with common literary texts would deepen community.

Hasebe-Ludt (1999) asks, “What do you recall of play and pleasure and desire in your experience as a student in school?” In her research in one elementary school in Eastern Vancouver, Hasebe-Ludt (1999) reminds us that children and teachers can experience great joy and pleasure in language and literacy experiences that bring them together in the classroom, such as reading poetry or discussing a picture book on the topic of immigration (such as *Grandfather’s Journey* by Allen Say). In this chapter, I will focus on the collective experiences of children and teachers in the classrooms in which my research took place in Montréal.

WE’RE ALL PART OF THE STORY

The theme for this chapter, **We’re All Part of the Story**, emerged from my data analysis and was a statement made by the Grade Two teacher, Madame Lili, during an interview¹⁶ in which she described the community in her classroom as dynamic and inclusive, a place where she hopes that all students find a sense of belonging within the group. She said,

*Une classe c’est une mini-société. Puis il y a des dynamiques qui sont bonnes il y a des dynamiques qui sont moins bonnes. Il faut jouer avec ça. Je change souvent les enfants de place. En plus ici, on est dans une commission scolaire inclusive où il y a des enfants avec des besoins particuliers dans nos classes. Je n’ai jamais voulu les mettre en retrait. Pour moi, c’est important que tous les enfants soient dans ma classe. Donc je trouve ça super important que les enfants ont un sentiment d’appartenance à leur classe, à leur groupe. **Ils sont dans l’histoire. Tout le monde est là. Puis on fait ça ensemble.** Mais c’est ça: c’est beaucoup d’amour, beaucoup de discipline, un mélange des deux.*

A class is a mini-society. Of course this consists of dynamics that are both positive and less positive. You need to play with that. I often move their desks around. Also, here we are in an inclusive school board and there are children with particular needs in our classes. I have never wanted them to be excluded. For me, it’s important that all children are in my class. I think it’s really important for all children to have a sense of belonging to their class and to their group. **They are part of the story. Everyone is there. And we are in this together.** Well, that’s it: a lot of love, a lot of discipline; a mix of both.

Interview, April 2014

¹⁶ Throughout this chapter, emphasis added is indicated by bolded words.

In the June interview, when I asked Madame Lili about the impact of the literature in the classroom community, she described the ways that the literature offered the children a chance to see that there is not one way to be normal, and to accept differences. By discussing their feelings and expressing themselves, literature can play a transformational role in the classroom.

Heather:	<i>Quel rôle est-ce que la littérature multiculturelle, comme ces livres-là, peut jouer dans ce contexte ici à Montréal dans une école très diverse? Quel rôle est-ce que ça peut jouer?</i>	What is the role that multicultural literature, such as these books, may play in this context in Montréal, in a diverse school? What role can it play?
Madame Lili:	<i>Je pense que c'est bon parce que... les enfants s'identifient aux personnages. Ils posent des questions ou ils font des liens avec leur vie à eux. Ils comprennent que ce qu'ils vivent c'est correct. Des fois des enfants veulent tellement être dans la norme puis être pareil comme les autres mais là ils voient, ils sont d'autres enfants qui sont comme moi, un peu différent puis c'est correct. Puis ça les aide aussi à verbaliser leurs sentiments. Mais ça c'est n'importe quel livre, je trouve, c'est ça qui est bien. Parce que tu as toujours, dans une histoire, multiculturelle ou autre, tu n'as toujours pas une leçon mais quelque chose de tirer de la lecture. Ça c'est bien pour eux parce qu'ils n'ont pas toujours l'occasion de parler de comment ils se sentent.</i>	I think that it's good because... the children identify with the characters. They ask questions and make connections to their lives. They understand that what they are going through is okay. Sometimes children want so badly to be in the norm and to be the same as others, but they see there they can see that, there are other children like me, a little bit different and it's okay. That helps them to express their feelings. And that's with any book, I find, that's what is great. Because you always have, in a story, multicultural or otherwise, you don't always have a lesson but something to get out of the reading. That's what's good for them because they don't always have the chance to talk about how they feel.
Heather:	<i>Oui.</i>	Yes.
Madame Lili:	<i>Et après de demander de faire les arts et la peinture ou autres, dessin, pâte à modeler. N'importe quoi. S'exprimer sur ça. Mais c'est bon pour eux... ils ont vraiment besoin.</i>	And after that, to ask them to do art and painting or other art, drawing, plasticine. Anything! To express themselves. It's really good for them... they need it!

Heather:	Comment ils ont besoin de parler. Des fois de parler de leur vies, la vie. Mais ça fait du bien. Je vois dans leurs visages.	They do really need to talk. Sometimes about their lives, life in general. That feels good. I can see it in their eyes.
Madame Lili:	<i>Ah, oui. C'est quasiment de la thérapie pour eux autres.</i>	Oh, yes. It's almost therapeutic for them.

Interview, June 2014

Pedagogy can be understood as “a fundamentally relational process; it takes shape as it unfolds” (Somerville, Davies, Power, Gannon, & de Carteret, 2011, p. 3). Through the examples in this chapter, I will discuss how the literature and responses gave us all a common purpose as we read, discussed, and created responses to the texts. I will now discuss the categories that have emerged in this theme:

CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES	RULE OF INCLUSION
<i>Deepening community</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respecting differences • Belonging 	This category refers to ways that responding to literature enabled a deeper or different sense of community in the classrooms.
<i>Time and space to read, play, and create together</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slowing down to enjoy the visual • Interconnectedness • ‘It felt like kindness’: Making connections through stories • Overlapping funds of knowledge 	This category refers to the spaces created by responding to literature, and taking part in literacy activities that enabled children and teachers to playfully engage and make connections with one another.

Table 12. Deepening community and time and space for reading and creating together.

DEEPENING COMMUNITY

Through sharing and talking about contemporary literature in the classroom, the children demonstrated their own funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) and their literacy experiences both in and beyond the classroom. The visual literature selected for the project opened up avenues for exploring questions of identity and belonging that are very relevant for today's increasingly diverse classrooms. The sense of community in the classrooms had begun prior to the start of this research study, as the children and teachers had already spent months together in the classroom. However, the engagements with literature enabled the sense of community to grow and build, particularly as the teachers invited the children to reflect and make meaning as they related the stories to their own lives.

This notion of community relates to both the previous themes discussed in Chapter Five: **All My Ideas Flow** and Chapter Six: **Listening with Your Heart**. For example, in Chapter Five, I have shared examples in which the children were engaged in sharing their stories of place in response to stories. For instance, when Hope and Yasmin, in Grade One, shared their paintings with one another and discussed their experiences, they shared a part of themselves while also engaging in friendship with each other. Also as described in Chapter Five, when Paul painted a picture of himself in China with his grandmother in response to *Le kimono de Suki*, he expressed an important part of his own identity and his relationship to his grandmother. The visual images created by the children, such as those by Yasmin, Hope, and Paul, were unique expressions of their own interests and journeys. As Christopher Myers (2014) writes, children need stories to imagine their own destinations. By responding together to the picture books and then listening to and viewing one another's responses, children became a part of an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006, pp. 6-7), in which the stories enabled them to imagine places they would go and to reflect on places they had been. Through reading a variety of stories with their teachers, the children had opportunities to explore, dream, and imagine alongside their peers.

As discussed in Chapter Four, there was already a strong sense of community in the school when I first visited in February. One of the key aspects of the critical pedagogy through literature

that fostered community in these classrooms was the opportunity for different voices to be heard and made visible, both through the discussions in the classroom and in visual arts. For instance, in Grade Two, Rukshana shared her knowledge of Urdu poetry with others when she read the poetry in *Le baiser mauve de Vava* and Paul shared his knowledge of Mandarin as he used it with his grandmother in China when he painted a picture after reading *Le kimono de Suki*. In Grade One, Madame Mai noticed how strong a connection children such as Ngozi made to the stories about Vava. I will attempt to illustrate through these examples the categories *respecting differences* and *belonging*.

RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Researchers and educators have noted that children are aware of differences such as gender and race in early childhood (MacNaughton, 2009; Paley, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagan, 2001). Literature often opens up discussions of differences. For instance, in Paley's *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, the children in her class discuss issues of fairness and exclusion, as one African American girl raises the issue of whether characters in the books could be girls and if they could be brown. While looking at the picture books written by Leo Lionni, Reeny asks her kindergarten teacher, "Why is they all mostly boys?" (2007, p. 69). The class then examine the texts together and find that all the books they have in their classroom feature male protagonists, and they eventually search the library to find one book with a female protagonist: *Geraldine the Music Mouse*. Reeny also raised another important question, asking her teacher, "Is Annie a brown girl like me?" Annie is a girl who is named but does not appear in the picture book *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*. Paley listened carefully to the critical questions raised by her students and they learned from one another while discussing the texts.

Having opportunities to talk about differences and the rights of each individual to be respected for who they are became an important theme of the classroom activities within this study. As discussed in Chapter Six, children are capable of understanding their own differences, as they have a keen awareness of their classroom community and their own identities.

In Madame Mai's classroom, during the month of May, we both remarked how the children were starting to use more brown crayons to represent the characters they were drawing. Madame Mai mentioned to me that she had noticed Ngozi would often draw herself as a white princess. When I looked at Ngozi's drawing that she did on my first visit to the class (see Figure 42) I noticed a difference with the work she did later on in terms of the colours she used to represent people (see Ngozi's painting of Vava in Chapter Five, Figure 32). This also reminded me of Paley's *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, which I mentioned to Madame Mai. She was interested in talking about the idea of children's racial identities and how it is expressed through artwork. Since this was of interest to Madame Mai, I brought a copy of the book for her.



Figure 42. Ngozi's drawing of children's rights.

As I have discussed in Chapter Six, the teachers played an important role in encouraging and fostering respect among the children in their classrooms. Madame Mai emphasized the children's ability to understand their own unique differences when referring to her class responding to the texts such as *Fourchon* and *J'ai le droit d'être un enfant*. Her observation of the children's responses to these texts is significant as it highlights the way in which she knows her students and values their individuality.

Madame Lili also noted that the literature contributed to the children's awareness of diversity and respect for differences. In our conversation during an interview at the end of the school year, we talked about the children's interest in learning about the authors of the books as well as the identities of the characters in the books. Madame Lili mentioned the children's interest in learning about Haiti when we read the stories by Dany Laferrière. The children also learned about specific Japanese cultural references when reading *Le kimono de Suki*, which prompted some children to ask Paul if he was Japanese. As Madame Lili mentioned, Paul explained with confidence that he was Chinese. Through his artwork that was shared with the class and displayed on the hallway bulletin along with the paintings of his peers, Paul had an opportunity to further express his cultural and linguistic heritage by painting himself in China and using Chinese characters in the painting.

Madame Lili:	<i>Ils posaient beaucoup de questions sur Dany Laferrière. C'est ou Haïti? Qui habite à Haïti? Puis ils étaient bien intéressés de savoir c'était quoi exactement.</i>	They asked a lot of questions about Dany Laferrière. Where is Haiti? Who lives in Haiti? And they were really interested to know more.
Heather:	<i>Et ils faisaient le lien avec leur pays. Oh, c'est comme Sri Lanka...le drapeau de Sri Lanka...c'est un autre pays.</i>	They made some connections with different countries. Oh, that's like the Sri Lankan flag...another country.
Madame Lili:	<i>Quand on a fait <i>Le kimono de Suki</i>, les enfants posaient des questions à Paul. Toi, Paul est-ce que tu es Japonais? Il expliquait non, moi je suis Chinois.</i>	And when we read <i>Suki's Kimono</i> , the children asked Paul if he was Japanese. He explained, 'No, I am Chinese'.

Interview, June 2014

The story *Fourchon* portrays a main character who feels different from the others, as he is a mix between a spoon and a fork. The theme of the book addresses the acceptance of differences when Fourchon finally finds his place and feels happy. In the middle of the book, Fourchon imagines what it would be like to see many characters that are a mix of two different objects. The story is a reference to mixed race children. The theme is relevant for considering diversity of families. Anna, in her response to the story (see Figure 43), wrote about how she is special because she has two dads.

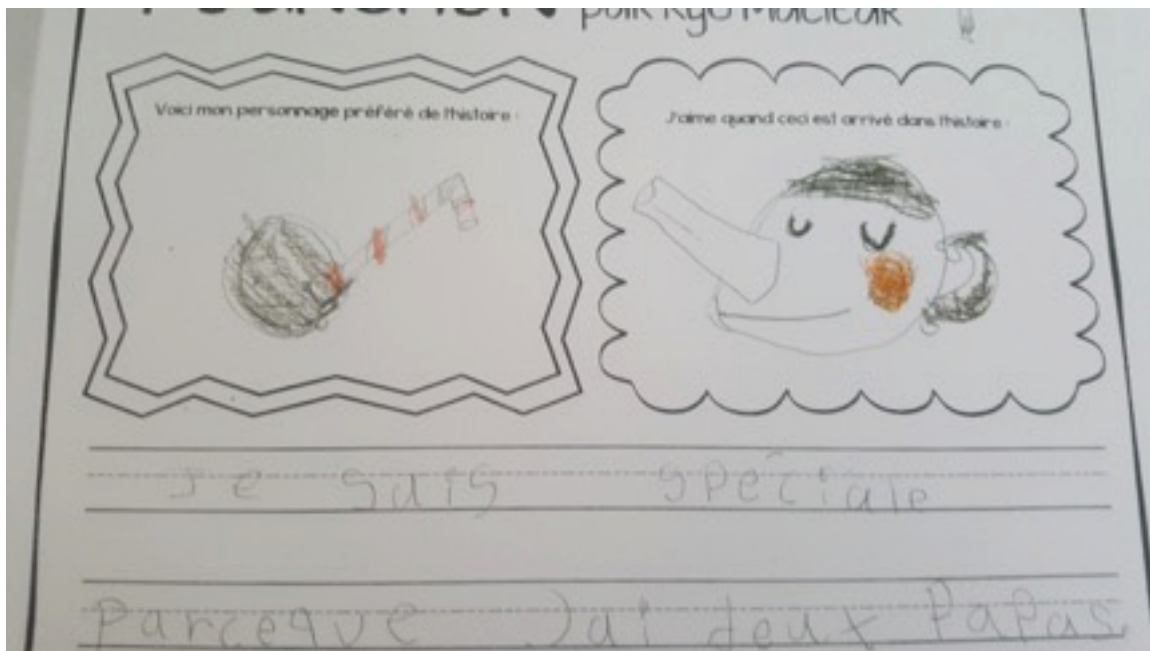


Figure 43. 'Je suis spéciale parce que j'ai deux papas.' Anna (Grade Two).

Earlier in this thesis I have referred to the UNCRC that states in Article 17 that children have the right to a diversity of media, including children's books, that contribute to their well-being. In order to understand more about differences in the world, there is a need for children to be able to have access to a wide variety of stories, and the possibilities are endless. The stories that we read are a few examples of the wide range of texts that are available for teachers and children to read and explore that facilitate understanding and respect of differences.

In another example of the community building and respecting difference, the story *Le kimono de Suki* prompted reflection on how one can express individuality within a group rather than conforming to the mainstream. Suki dances in front of her Grade One class, wearing her kimono, moving freely as she demonstrates the movements she saw at the Japanese festival. Her class is impressed with her dancing and she gains their respect. The teacher played an important role in this story as she invited Suki to speak to the class about her kimono. The teacher is portrayed as a warm personality and has a unique style of dressing, with bright clothing and a scarf tied around her head. In Aleem's painting (Figure 44) he has represented Suki dancing in front of her peers.

He has illustrated the teacher, standing beside Suki. His visual response to the story shows a deep understanding of the significance of this pivotal moment in the text.



Figure 44. Suki dancing in her classroom, painting by Aleem (Grade 2).

Aleem's painting, in response to *Le kimono de Suki* remind us how important it is to consider how to ensure that each child feels respected in the classroom, and for children to hear one another's voices.

As stated in the quote opening this chapter, "interaction is essential to creating 'community', and a sense of safety, connection and acceptance" (Lenette et al., 2016, p. 11). The interaction among the children and teachers while reading and responding to literature demonstrated the ways that children in the classroom learn to respect one another and to feel connected. This leads me to the next category that is related to community building: *belonging*.

BELONGING

The literature project theme of *Les enfants qui parlent aux enfants* guided the inquiry as it gave us a focus that was structured and yet open-ended enough to allow time for deep engagement. In the June interview, Madame Lili reflected on the children's participation,

Je pense que les enfants souvent ils ont identifié aux héros, tu sais. Puis je pense qu'avec les livres ils ont vraiment embarqués dans les histoires. Ils s'identifiaient avec l'enfant qui était dans l'histoire et tout ce qu'il est arrivé puis tout ça. Tu sais au début on disait on va essayer de trouver des livres qui parlent aux enfants, qui s'adressent aux enfants. Ça a bien marché là. Ils ont beaucoup embarqué dans ce concept.

I think that often the children identified with the protagonist, you know. I think that they really got into the stories. They identified with the child who was the protagonist in the story and all that happened to them and everything. You know, at the beginning we said that we were going to find books that spoke to children, which addressed children. That worked very well. They really got into the theme.

Interview, June 2014

Arjunu, in Grade Two, responded to the story *Fourchon* by portraying the character looking at his reflection in the toaster (Figure 45). This was the point in the story where Fourchon felt like he did not belong in the kitchen as he was different from the other cutlery. Following the story read-aloud and the discussion, the children reflected on what makes each of them special or unique. Arjunu wrote,

*Je suis spécial parce que mes yeux sont brun.
Je suis brun.*

I am special because I have brown eyes. I am brown.

Arjunu's reflection on the story, both in his drawing and in his words, shows his understanding of the theme of the story. Arjunu's family is from Sri Lanka and he speaks Tamil with his family at home. He demonstrates compassion for the character in the story, as well as self-awareness of his own sense of identity within the multicultural context of this primary classroom in Montréal.



Figure 45. Arjunu's response to *Fourchon*.

In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley writes of how the children in kindergarten related to the characters in Leo Lionni's picture books. As she describes one boy in her class who had moved from Poland and was learning to speak and understand English, and how he was able to connect with the story of Pezzatino. Paley underlines the importance of such stories that accurately depict the feelings of children, such as the need to feel a sense of belonging,

Leo Lionni's skill in portraying the feeling of being 'less than' is remarkable.

Pezzatino is every child who has ever walked into a classroom. "Do I belong here? Does someone care about me?" Perhaps the lonely island Pezzatino is sent to does in fact represent school, where children are broken into pieces in order that adults may observe, label, and classify them. And, having been so dissected, how does the child become whole again? (Paley, 1997, p. 54)

As Paley (1997) notes, when children become deeply familiar with the characters in stories, as her students did with the books by Leo Lionni, they develop a sense of shared "narrative

continuity” in the classroom through their conversations, play, and artistic responses to the texts over time (p. 74). The teachers and I observed that over the project, as the children became familiar with the stories we read, they would come up in our conversations even outside on the playground or when the children saw me after school (such as at the evening talent night). Shuja, in Grade One, constantly asked me if there was a third or fourth book about Vava. It almost became a joke between us, as he would ask me whenever he saw me around the school. I told him that there were only three books, but maybe he would like to write the fourth book. He insisted that he had seen the fourth book somewhere and that it must exist.

In the next category, *Time and Space to Read, Play, and Create Together*, I will focus on how the children and teachers engaged playfully with literature and with one another in the French classrooms. I also describe some of our conversations related to community and identity that took place in the library.

TIME AND SPACE TO READ, PLAY, AND CREATE TOGETHER

One of the most important elements of engaging with literature was the time that the teachers and children took to read and talk about the stories. I have mentioned in the previous chapters of this thesis the importance of slowing down and taking time to read and respond to literature. The picture book read-alouds and discussions allowed for children and teachers to engage in dialogue that allowed for a sense of connection among the members in the classroom that was further enhanced through the participation in response activities such as drawing and painting.

SLOWING DOWN TO ENJOY THE VISUAL

When reading together in the classroom, the teachers and the children shared in the experience of interpreting and discussing the meaning in the texts as well as relating their experiences. The importance of slowing down to read and appreciate the visual images is closely related to the enjoyment of the texts. The time spent looking at and discussing the visual literature enhances the children’s perception and ability to interpret the texts. I would argue that this also relates to the

children's interest in producing images, as discussed in Chapter Five. For instance, Vecchi (2010) describes the importance of allowing children time to experience the qualities of colours,

All of us are born equipped with an extremely refined sensibility for perceiving colour; but as with other perceptive abilities it is the brain that must practice decoding. To achieve this task it is important for it to encounter adequate contexts, otherwise we lose opportunities for seeing and tasting the things around us. We are not helped in this task by a hurried, superficial culture that tends to diminish a sense of wonder, our interests and emotions...(p. 31)

In the following example, Madame Lili was reading from *Je suis fou de Vava* and drawing on the words and images of the story to engage the children. As the majority of the children in her class are learning French as an additional language, listening to the story read aloud and engaging in a conversation in response to the text provided a playful way of learning French. For example, when Madame Lili showed a picture of all of the fish swimming in the ocean in Haiti, she helped the children to visualize the location of the story in the Caribbean. She asked,

Est-ce que vous pensez qu'il y a autant de poissons différents dans l'océan? Est-ce que vous êtes allés à l'océan?

Do you think there are that many different fish in the ocean? Have you been to the ocean?

Fieldnotes, Grade Two, May 2014

The children responded « *oui!* » and were eager to share their stories about visiting the ocean.

Taking the time to talk about the setting and the children's own experiences of being by the ocean contributed to a high level of engagement with the text.

When Madame Lili showed a picture in *Je suis fou de Vava* of the young boy sitting outside with his grandmother on the yellow porch of their house in Haiti, she asked the children to look at and describe the grandmother. This attention to the detail in the image engaged the children both with the characters and with the context of the story. Da, the grandmother, is drinking coffee peacefully on the porch while the narrator remarks that it is her paradise, a detail that shows the particularity of the character in the story and also an important aspect of the geographical location and Haitian culture.

Madame Lili (to class):	<i>Qu'est-ce que Da fait?</i>	What is Da doing?
Nicolas:	<i>Elle boit du café.</i>	She is drinking coffee.
Madame Lili:	<i>C'est son paradis. Toi, tu devrais avoir un paradis, aussi. C'est quoi ton paradis?</i>	That's her paradise. You, too, must have a paradise. What is your paradise?
Nicolas:	<i>Les bonbons! [Playfully]</i>	Sweets! [Playfully]

Fieldnotes, Grade Two, May 2014

The interaction between Madame Lili and her class in reading this story enabled the class to collectively participate in the world of the book based on author Dany Laferrière's childhood memories in Haiti.

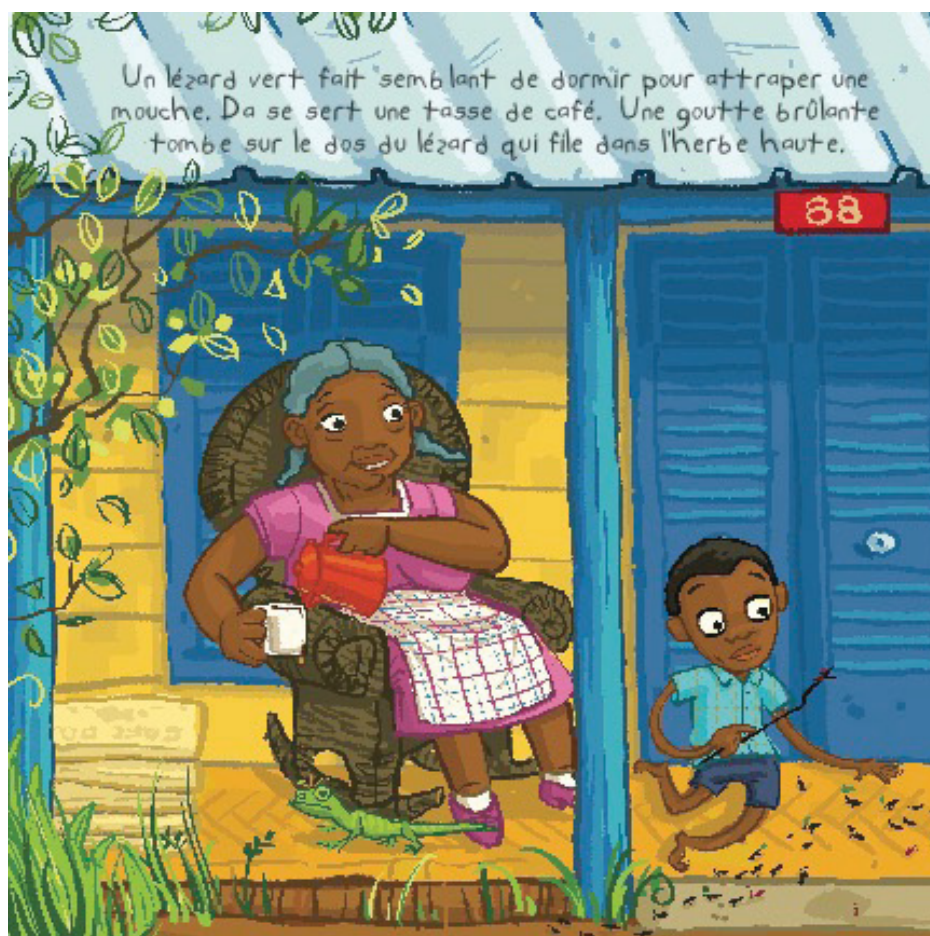


Figure 46. *Je suis fou de Vava*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Image from *Je suis fou de Vava* by Dany Laferrière and Frédéric Normandin. Illustrations © 2006 Frédéric

By emphasizing the small details of the story, Madame Lili drew in her class as readers and they became connected to the books and characters over time. Madame Lili's enthusiasm for the story was evident, as she was also interested in learning about Dany Laferrière's childhood and in taking pleasure in the poetic narrative. This brings me back to the point made in Chapter Three regarding children and teachers learning together, as described by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. What is particular about this shared experience of learning through visual literature is that the children and teachers are engaged in reading the words and images to discuss the themes, characters, and ideas presented in the stories.

Madame Lili noted that she was pleased with the interest that children showed in engaging with literature,

*Qu'est-ce qui m'intéresse avec le projet au départ c'est la base du projet : la lecture et les livres. Ça m'accroche. Puis j'étais surprise avec les enfants à quel point ils étaient content de commencer ça et ils aiment **entendre parler des livres**. Je savais qu'ils aimaient ça, mais je ne pensais pas qu'ils aimaient ça autant. Ils sont contents!*

What has interested me with the project from the start is the foundation of the project: reading and stories. That got me hooked. Then I was surprised with the children and how happy they were to start and they like **to hear (other people) talk about books**. I knew they would like it, but I didn't imagine that they liked it so much. They are happy!

Interview, April 2014

While reading *Virginia Wolf*, Madame Mai asked her class to focus on the ways colours expressed feelings. She asked them to look at the colour of the wolf and the children replied « *noir* » and noted the wolf was sad. Then she asked what colours were happy. The children exclaimed « *rouge, jaune, violet, vert, rose...* » as Madame Mai showed them images from the book *Virginia Wolf* (Fieldnotes, Grade One, April 23, 2014). This was a lesson in visual literacy (Burke, 2013).

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

The children's representation of the stories is illustrated in the murals they created together.

Madame Lili noted,

J'ai bien aimé ça le mosaïque, c'était impressionnant de voir les enfants. Ils ont représenté complètement différemment mais ça se ressemble quand même.

I liked the mural, it was impressive to see how the children...they represented the story completely differently but it resembles the story all the same.

Interview, June 2014

It is interesting to note that the children in Grade Two depicted several key elements such as the yellow house with the blue door, with the boy and his grandmother sitting on the front porch. The mural below (Figure 47) was created by a group of Grade Two students. As they worked side by side on the floor of the school library on this drawing, the process of creating the picture collaboratively was organic: the children looked at each other drawing as they added to the picture that draws on various elements of Dany Laferrière's books *Je suis fou de Vava* and *Le baiser mauve de Vava*.

In the picture, the children have represented the importance of the relationship of home and place in the story. The young boy, with his loving grandmother Da, loves to spend time with her on the porch and listen to her stories. Author Dany Laferrière beautifully describes the slow nature of those summer days and evenings with his grandmother, where the ants crawling on the front balcony fascinated him. The children have included this small detail in the mural, with the groups of ants crawling on the wooden porch. Furthermore, the children chose to include many of the birds and butterflies in the drawing. The picture represented by the children shows an understanding of the interconnectedness and relationship between all things.



Figure 48. Mural by Grade One class.

While working on the mural, the Grade One students also reflected on and showed me parts of the stories they enjoyed, while also engaging in playful conversation. Below is an excerpt from the dialogue among a group of Grade One children working on drawing the mural. During our conversation, Karavai mentioned that she was happy when the young girl Vava heals from her sickness in the book *Le baiser mauve de Vava*. Although Karavai was addressing a difficult topic, this dialogue was also interspersed with humour and laughter. As a researcher working with young children, I followed the children's conversation and played along with them. Karavai, Alicia, and Jayden expressed their joy in working together on this project.

Karavai: My favourite part was, where was that part, when Vava got all better.

Heather: Ah, *oni*. Where was that? How did you feel when she got better?

Karavai: I feel happy and very excited too. When I didn't even hear the story I hoped she got better.

Heather: Mmmmm.

Alicia: Hey, why's the red naked?

Karavai: What?

Heather: It's lost its clothes.

Alicia: The baby lost its clothes.

Jayden: Let's find his clothes!

Heather: How do you feel about doing a big picture together on a big mural with your class?

Jayden: Because I feel excited because we make the whole details.

Alicia: Haaaaappy!!

Karavai: I feel good and very surprised.

Heather: Was it the first time you did it?

Karavai: I think I did it in kindergarten. Yeah, I actually did. And I like to do it this time too. I liked it because it could give me a lot of ideas for the pictures I'm making.

Literacy activity, Grade One, May 2014

As I worked with this group of children, we were in the school library, a quiet and well-lit space. We were fortunate to have room to spread out comfortably with our art supplies and picture books (as depicted in Figure 49). The time that we worked on this mural, and other projects, was focused and allowed us to engage deeply in the aesthetic experience of drawing, while also reflecting on the literature.



Figure 49. Mural in library by Grade One class.

In early June, we invited a local Haitian Canadian artist to visit the classes and share his artwork. He presented in French to the children and teachers, displaying his paintings in the library and talking about the artistic styles. The artist worked with the children to paint on a large canvas (see Figure 50). This was an activity that brought all of the children and teachers together in an aesthetic experience of community as both the children and teachers were learning from the artist. The painting has become part of a display in the main office of Garden Meadows School, where it is visible for all students, teachers, and visitors in the school community.



Figure 50. Mural by Grades One and Two students with visiting artist.

‘IT FELT LIKE KINDNESS’: MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH LITERATURE

Reading stories together in the classroom, and participating in literary response activities, contributed to the children’s connections they made with one another and to different texts. As discussed in Chapter Five, the children’s responses to picture books showed how literature enables children to express empathy and compassion as they learn about the experiences of characters in the books. Furthermore, when the children reflected on their experiences with the books in the classroom, they made connections with one another and with their teachers while sharing the experience of reading together.

Sarah stated that when she was listening to her teacher read the stories throughout the literacy project, “*It felt like kindness*” (Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014). In my observations in the classrooms during read-alouds, I did see that the children and teachers connected during this time. The children enjoyed sitting close together with their friends, while listening. Many children also liked to be near the teacher, right at the front. In my observations, both the body language and the conversations showed the social bonds that were fostered during reading. For instance, in the Grade Two class, Saayakann would often put his arm around his friend Osman while they sat at the back of the group and listened together to their teacher Madame Lili.

The conversations with the children also revealed their understanding of social relationships within the stories. For instance, in the conversation with a group of Grade Two children discussing *Virginia Wolf*, Sarah noted an important theme in the book when she talked about the relationship between the two sisters and said, “*It reminded me of sweet and love and everything*”. Indeed, the power of love to overcome sadness is one of the themes of the story as Vanessa cares for her sister Virginia and paints her a beautiful garden to cheer her up. Interestingly, when discussing this text, the children in the focus group were reminded of another children’s story with a theme of caring and love: *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. When the children began to discuss *The Giving Tree*, a story they had read a year earlier in Grade One, they were very animated and enthusiastic about sharing their memories of this book. It was clearly a favourite, as one of the girls insisted on finding it to show us the French copy of the book, near where we were sitting in the library. This relates to the sense of “narrative continuity” that Vivian Paley (1997) describes when her kindergarten students, especially Reeny, fell in love with the Lio Lionni books (p. 74).

- Sarah:** Well, I loved... my favourite part was when the sister was kind and when, you know with the wolf, the other sister...**And then Virginia turned kind. I loved that part—when they went to the meadow together.**
- Heather:** Oh, to the meadow together. Did it remind you of anything?
- Sarah:** **It reminded me of, of sweet and love and everything.**
- Paul:** Lewis, remember in Grade One with Miss Paggio, she read us the, um, *The Giving Tree*?
- Sarah:** Yes!
- Lewis:** Oooh, yeah!
- Heather:** *The Giving Tree.*
- Sarah:** Yes, it's about a boy and a tree that grows up with him, but then the tree dies and...
- Paul:** No, No, she has nothing to give him!
- Heather:** Ohhhhh.
- Sarah:** Yeah, it's sad.
- Heather:** And then the boy grows up.
- Lewis:** And then he gives a big part of the tree and then it's a wall for him to sit on when he gets older, like 69 or something.
- Heather:** Oh. That is a good story. *The Giving Tree.*
- Mia:** Oh, wait. It's here! It's here in the library, but in French. I know where it is, but it's in French. [She ran to find the book and show us]

Focus group, Grade Two, June 2014

The children's connections between the contemporary picture book *Virginia Wolf*, and a classic, *The Giving Tree*, reveal their understanding of the related themes of kindness and love, as well as sadness, in these visual texts. The fact that the children shared in the experience of reading these stories, with their teachers, and made connections in the act of interpreting the stories together, reveals the value of literacy experiences to contribute to the life of the classroom. As noted by Sumara (2002), "literature can be a focal practice that creates the possibility for deep insight" (p. xiii).

In Grade Two, the children's appreciation for the poetic language and emotions of the text was enhanced when Madame Lili engaged her class in writing poetry collectively in response to *Le baiser mauve de Vava*.

Madame Lili:	<i>On va faire de la poésie.</i>	We're going to do poetry.
Les enfants:	<i>Poésie?! [This was a new word for them in French]</i>	Poetry?!
Madame Lili:	<i>Les poèmes. Dans ce livre, il écrit un poème. On va écrire un poème.</i>	Poems. In this book, he writes a poem. We are going to write a poem .
Les enfants:	<i>Oui!</i>	Yes!
Nicolas:	YES! <i>En français?! [Making a gesture with his arm to show excitement]</i>	YES! In French?! [He sounded amazed that they would actually be writing a poem in French. Nicolas loves words and writes his own rap songs in English]

Fieldnotes, Grade Two, May 2014

Madame Lili used the projector to show the children how they would compose the poem, line by line. I described this earlier in Chapter Five, where I explained that she used words from the text and placed them in a box for the children to pull out. It was like a game. Two words were drawn at a time and the class together came up with a sentence. She wrote the sentences down on the Smartboard for all to see, which enabled the children to “hear the teacher speak aloud about the thinking that accompanies the process: topic choice, how to start the piece, lining out, looking for a better word...” (Graves, 1983, p. 43).

Graves (1983) suggests that writing with children will help children to become writers. He notes,

Teachers don't have to be expert writers to 'write' with the children. In fact, there may be an advantage in growing with them, learning together as both seek meaning in writing. However, it does take courage to show words to children who haven't seen an adult write before. (p. 43)

OVERLAPPING FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

In previous chapters, I have discussed the view that children bring resources and funds of knowledge to the classroom. An interesting aspect of working in the multicultural classrooms of this study was that as the children engaged in literacy practices, they often found common experiences and overlapping funds of knowledge related to their linguistic and cultural identities. Conversations arose as children confidently expressed their own experiences. Möller and Allen (2000) described how a researcher worked with a small group of four girls reading a novel together outside of the classroom. The space that was created with the support of a mentor enabled the girls to share their personal responses to the text. As a researcher, I was also a part of the community with the children and teachers. When children joined conversations and activities in small groups in the library, they shared personal narratives.

Sometimes children and I talked about language during activities in the classroom, and occasionally I brought multilingual books to the classroom as children were interested to see texts in different languages during their free reading time. When I brought Tamil books to show Arjunu and Jalindu, their eyes lit up and they sat beside each other whispering and giggling with joy as it was something they shared. They recognized the words and were eager to share their knowledge, as Arjunu explained that he would bring a book to show me. Madame Lili was also interested to see the Tamil book.

- Arjunu:** I have a book (in Tamil) and I might bring it here. And I can show you how many letters (are in the Tamil language).
- Heather:** How many letters are there?
- Arjunu:** I don't know how much, but it looks like a bunch. There's MORE than 26! This is a book in **our language** [he said proudly to his friend]!

Classroom conversation, April 2014

However, conversations about different languages occurred more often in the library when we were in smaller groups. For instance, many of the Grade Two students spoke, during our literacy activities and conversations, about books they read, TV and films they watched in different

languages at home, including French, English, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi, or languages that they spoke for religious practices, such as learning Arabic to read the Qu’ran.

When Rasmeen and Aleem shared with me about television programs and films they watched in Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi, while Jalindu and Arjunu talked about watching TV in Tamil at home, they demonstrated their multilingual competencies and knowledge of literacies. While they were sharing with me, during a conversation in the library, they found that they both also shared overlapping funds of knowledge related to languages. Aleem and Rasmeen showed a strong interest in sharing their linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as to learning more about one another. When Aleem found out that Rasmeen could understand Urdu, since she was familiar with the Hindi language, he was very pleased.

Aleem: *Assalym Malaykm.* That means hello in a polite way. **How do you say hi in Rasmeen’s language?**

Rasmeen: *Sas reek al.*

Aleem: *Sas reel kal.*

Aleem: And *kasi hein* means how are you...oh, and then your friend says *mayen theek hun*. That means I’m good how are you? *Mayen theek hun. Ap kasi hein.*

Rasmeen: *Teeko*...is that how you say it?

Aleem: *Teeko?* Oh yeah. *Mayen theek.* That mean’s I’m good. I’m fine. Yeah! I didn’t know you know my language!

Rasmeen: I know a lot about his language—because I saw some TV shows...and some of my mom’s friends.

Conversation in library, Grade Two, June 2014

Rasmeen made the point that her brothers would usually speak to her in English, as she said they had been immersed in the language at school. She explained, “*They speak Punjabi to my parents. But they speak English to me. They’re more like ‘English’ because of school*” (Conversation in library, June 2014). Aleem agreed with Rasmeen while thinking about his own siblings and the languages they spoke, adding, “*Yeah and everything*”. This conversation between Rasmeen and Aleem reflects their experiences of living in a multilingual family in Montréal, attending a bilingual school in which the

curriculum focuses on English and French, and yet having an interest in maintaining their heritage languages, Urdu and Punjabi, as a part of their identities.

When Rasmeen and Aleem and I engaged in a conversation in the school library, we discussed foods, languages, and stories while also drawing. The drawing and our conversation took place in a moment where both children were discussing their experiences of having family living in India and Pakistan. When Aleem, who speaks Urdu, and Rasmeen, who speaks Punjabi with her family and understands Hindi through her participation in the heritage language classes and in watching TV at home, found that their languages, Punjabi and Urdu, have common words for sweets or *mithai*, they were proud and excited to discuss this in the context of the school. Aleem and Rasmeen both shared about how they would speak in Urdu or Punjabi at home with their parents, but more often communicate in English with their siblings. They could relate to one another, as having an interest in their heritage languages, Urdu and Punjabi respectively, and yet they also pointed out that the school system in mainstream languages had an impact on their language use where their siblings did not always want to speak Punjabi or Urdu since they had been so immersed in the culture and language of the school and mainstream society.

Through our conversations and literacy activities, I learned that Rasmeen and Aleem were passionate about their multilingual language identities, and they showed an awareness of the complexities of negotiating their languages in the context of Montréal. Furthermore, they expressed an interest in learning from one another and encouraging their explorations of cultural and heritage language identities. At school, where English and French are spoken, they do not often have an opportunity to express or discuss the knowledge they have of their heritage languages.

Aleem: You know there's....*Gulab Jamun*? [A dessert]

Rasmeen: Yeah. Like sweets.

Aleem: What's it called?

Rasmeen: *Jalebi*?

Aleem: No. Oh yeah, there's *Jalebi*.

Rasmeen: *Buklava*?

Aleem: Just tell me the name! What do you call them!? [Searching for the word]

Rasmeen: What?

Aleem: *Rasgulla*? Do you know any of those?

Rasmeen: *Rasgulla*? Maybe...[Pausing to think]

Aleem: What's the name? What are these called? [Urgently tapping his pencil]

Rasmeen: Sweets.

Aleem: Yeah, they're sweets, but there's a name for it!

Rasmeen: *Mithai*!

Aleem: Oh yeah! *Mithai*!

Heather: In what language.

Rasmeen: In Urdu. But in my language it's *mithai*.

Aleem: Mine too.

Rasmeen: Urdu and Punjabi is kind of like the same.

Conversation in library, June 2014

Clearly, the topic of sweets (*mithai*) was dear to their hearts. Most importantly, finding that another child understood the same terms and kinds of desserts seemed to be refreshing and reassuring. I believe that these kinds of topics could be explored much more in depth by finding out more about children's overlapping funds of knowledge in the classroom and taking these topics to explore more deeply through projects and reading a wide variety of literature. Such opportunities

also position the teacher or researcher as a learner, as the children share their knowledges (for instance, I had to look up the words for the desserts, although I now see them on the menu whenever I visit an Indian restaurant).

In another conversation with Rukshana and Marjeena, they shared with me about their visits to places in Pakistan they loved, such as the mountains and gardens in Karachi. They were so excited to talk about their travels, having visited similar areas, and they agreed that Pakistan was “*a beautiful place*”. While they were talking, I asked if they had completed any school projects about their experiences visiting Pakistan. Rukshana expressed that she had not, but she would work on making something at home. Marjeena fondly remembered how her Grade One teacher, in another school in Montréal, had asked her to make a poster to talk about her country and write down words in Urdu. This project was meaningful for her, and also involved her sister in helping her to write in her language.

- Heather:** Did you do some projects on Pakistan in your school?
- Rukhsana:** Mmmnmm. But I’m gonna at home.
- Marjeena:** But when I was in Grade One, I went to a school...
- Rukhsana:** She went to another school in Grade One by the way.
- Marjeena:** They don’t do our language. So they said...**And my mother was Pakistani. My country was Pakistan. And the teacher said like, what is your country? You have to write about it and make pictures. So I did a project.**
- Heather:** Oh, you did. Wow.
- Marjeena:** Yeah. My sister helped me a bit.
- Heather:** You were in Grade One and you did a project about Pakistan.
- Marjeena:** Yeah. And she (the teacher) said like you have to write in our language. Like write a word or something.
- Rukhsana:** Yeah. She knows how to write (Urdu). I only know a few words.

Conversation in library, Grade Two, June 2014

Such conversations—and opportunities that enable children to share their knowledges—are immensely enriching for both children and adults. This requires time and space within an early childhood classroom.

DISCUSSION

This chapter has discussed ways in which the children and teachers in the culturally and linguistically diverse primary classrooms connected with one another through engagements with visual literature. The individual voices and identities in the classroom were made visible as children and teachers listened to one another by sharing responses to contemporary Canadian picture books. As noted by Hasebe-Ludt (1999), “children’s identity is co-constructed with/in the reading relations and other personal kinds of relating with people and places around them” (p. 51). Graves (1983) observes that the “class becomes a community when we possess a growing fund of facts about each other’s experiences. Strangers don’t work well together. When a class becomes a community, its members learn to help and model for each other” (p. 51). Thus, it is important for children and teachers to truly know one another.

The way that children showed their willingness to help one another contributed to a deeper sense of classroom community. For example, when Arjunu described how his friend Nicolas helped him with drawing the outline of the motorcycle that he painted after reading *Virginia Wolf*, he was referring to the joy of working alongside his friend. When Sarah, Lewis, Paul, and Mia discussed the text *Virginia Wolf* and then remembered reading *The Giving Tree*, they also helped one another to recollect the stories read by their teachers. The children and teachers came to know more about one another (Graves, 1983).

A familiarity with the stories, and having compassion for the characters in the books, was part of our shared literary experience. It was this common experience of reading the stories over time that contributed to a shared connection among the children, teachers, and myself as a researcher. Furthermore, the interactions with literature revealed ways of respecting differences and feeling a sense of belonging. Sumara (2002) observes that “reading a common literary text can

create opportunities to interpret personal and collective experience, and re-reading that text can generate surprising and purposeful insights” (p. 19).

By focusing on both collective and individual responses to children’s experiences in the stories, the teachers facilitated children’s connections with one another. For example, collective responses included the murals created by each class in response to *Le baiser mauve de Vava*. In representing the stories, the children imagined together while creating the murals. Individual responses to literature were also meaningful for children and teachers, such as the responses to the text *Fourchon*. As noted by Graves (1983), selections of books in classroom read-alouds offer rich examples for children to gain a “strong sense of story and drama,”

Reading different authors aloud also provides for different voices and topics for the children to sample. The objective is not to have the child write and illustrate like Robert McCloskey, Beatrix Potter, or Marguerite Henry. Rather, the objective is to enjoy the plots, the fantasies, the taste of words, to be stimulated by the drama of events. (p. 29)

Importantly, when the teachers and children engaged with looking closely at visual images in the texts, there was a sense of collective enjoyment in looking at the pictures. This was evident as Madame Lili read aloud from the book *Je suis fou de Vava* and took time to discuss how the grandmother slowly drank her coffee, asking the children about what brought them pleasure, or what was their own paradise. The image of Petit-Goâve (see Figure 46), with such details as the boy watching the ants crawling on the porch while sitting beside his grandmother, evokes the feeling of a slow and hot summer evening. Madame Lili, by slowing down to enjoy this with her class, encouraged the children’s appreciation of the text. This relates to Hasebe-Ludt’s (1999) question regarding what we, as adults, remember about play and pleasure in childhood. Furthermore, the slowing down for visual literacy enhanced the awareness of aesthetics and wonder. Mulcahey (2009) writes,

Artists often look at things more closely than most people do. They tend to notice things that others might miss, often with the eyes of a child. For example, while driving or walking, they may notice the stretch of telephone wires against the sky as the wires converge and then separate. Or they may see the nuances of colour. (p. 12)

The conversations and artwork in response to literature revealed that children, such as Arjunu, Aleem, Jalindu, Marjeena, Paul, Rukshana, Rasmeen, and Sarah, were interested in expressing their identities while also being connected and open to others. The findings related to belonging and overlapping funds of knowledge suggest that there is a strong interest among children who speak minority languages to explore and maintain their linguistic identities as multilingual speakers. Stein (2008) notes that research grounded in critical pedagogy may apply multimodality as a way of “making classrooms more democratic, inclusive spaces in which the histories, identities, cultures, languages, discourses, and epistemologies of students whose lives and life-worlds are excluded or marginalized from classrooms, can be made visible” (p. 886). The role of stories—in many forms—can provide insights into the realities and lived experiences of children (Pahl, 2014).

One of the most critical issues was the way that children showed confidence when teachers recognized their individuality and interests. The challenge, within a diverse classroom, is for teachers to know their students well and to be aware of their interests. Visual arts and literature can help to create more awareness through discussions. Lewis (2016), in her doctoral study, documented the experiences of Caribbean parents with children attending Francophone schools in Montréal. Drawing on a study by Wane (2004), Lewis (2016) mentions that teachers who are unaware of the difference between “African and Caribbean students may engage in essentializing, which negates the personal histories and sociocultural aspects of their identity” (p. 15). As the teachers and children in this study came to know more about their personal histories and identities, there was a deepening of community. However, as Greene (1995) remarks, “...a community...is always in the making. Marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and a dialogue about others, it must remain open to newcomers, those too long thrust aside” (p. 39).

One of the findings of this study is that there would be much room for home and school connections between teachers and families to be fostered. The comments from the teachers suggested that they felt the demands of teaching French at school within the time constraints of a bilingual program. Madame Mai had herself grown up within a minority language community, and didn’t speak French or English before attending school, and so she was aware of the challenges of

learning language. And yet, she felt there was a lack of parental support with school tasks, such as homework.

Ici les parents ne sont pas investis dans l'école. Que tu envoies les devoirs à la maison, ce n'est pas fait. Tu fais les dictées mais ils n'étudient pas les mots. Alors c'est très difficile d'essayer, tout doit être fait à l'école. Mais tu n'as vraiment pas le temps si tu as deux jours et demi en français avec chaque groupe. S'il y a une journée pédagogique tu as une journée avec les enfants et une demi-journée, tu ne peux vraiment pas faire le curriculum. Mais chez nous j'étais très bien encadrée, ma mère ne parlait ni anglais ni français, puis dans les années quatre vingt, c'était le dictionnaire. Et quand elle avait une lettre envoyée à la maison, elle regardait chaque mot dans le dictionnaire, anglais/chinois pour savoir qu'est-ce que ça disait. C'est pour ça que j'aimais l'école et j'adore l'école encore. Et je fais encore mes études. Mais je trouve que c'est important parce que l'encadrement à la maison ça dit tout. Mais ici c'est beaucoup ou c'est juste leurs mamans, leurs papas ne sont pas là.

Parents are not really invested in the school. If you send homework home, it's never completed. You have dictées, but the words are not studied. So it's very difficult to try, everything has to be completed at school. But you don't really have time if you have two and a half days in French with each group. If there is a professional day, you have one full day with your students and a half day, you can't really do the curriculum! In my childhood, I was very well supported. My mother didn't speak English or French. But when a letter was sent home, she looked at each word in the English/Chinese dictionary to know what was said. That's why I liked school and I still like school. I am still studying. But I find that home support says everything. Here there are many single mothers, their fathers are not there.

Interview, April 2014

Clearly, in a bilingual program where the teachers each have two and a half days per week to teach poses challenges for getting to know the children, as does teaching the curriculum in an additional language (French is the third language spoken by the majority of the students). And yet, the children also described their awareness of their abilities to speak different languages. Rukshana spoke proudly about how she read in French, English, and Urdu. Marjeena, in Grade Two, described her memory of making a poster about Pakistani language and culture the year prior where the teacher asked her to write words in Urdu. As noted by Graves (1983), "children tip their hands about what they know in informal conversations, in items they bring to school, in specialty reports... or at share times" (p. 23). In my role as a researcher, I had the privilege of having time for informal

conversations with children (Maguire, 1999; see also Maguire, 1987) that enabled me to learn about their interests. Clearly, as Madame Mai stated, there is a tension for teachers that is present to meet the demands of completing a curriculum within a time frame. In June, when Madame Mai spoke of the children's interest in reading, she expressed that some had asked if they could borrow the books to take them home, but the school year had nearly finished.

Madame Mai:	<i>Puis il y avait quelques élèves qui ont demandé s'ils pouvaient les emprunter et puis les retourner.</i>	And the students asked if they could borrow the books and bring them back!
Heather:	<i>Ab, oui. Et tu les donnais?</i>	Oh, yeah. Did you give them the books to borrow?
Madame Mai:	<i>Non, parce que c'était la semaine passé. J'ai dit, ab, c'est presque fini.</i>	No, because it was just last week and I thought well, school's almost finished.
Heather:	<i>Ab, oui. J'ai donné un livre à Gabrielle (Le baiser mauve de Vava) pour la fin de semaine.</i>	Oh, yeah. I actually gave a book (<i>Le baiser mauve de Vava</i>) to Gabrielle to borrow for the weekend.
Madame Mai:	<i>Oui, elle m'a dit.</i>	Yeah, she told me that.
Heather:	<i>Et j'ai dit de le rapporter la semaine prochaine. Mais ça c'est une bonne idée pour un autre projet dans le futur.</i>	And I asked her to bring it back the next week. Well, that's a good idea for a project in the future.
Madame Mai:	<i>Oui!</i>	Yeah!

Interview, June 2014

Perhaps there would be a way for stories, of all different genres, to become a way to bridge between home and school? Work by scholars such as González, Moll and Amanti (2005) have described this,

However, the ultimate border—the border between knowledge and power—can be crossed only when educational institutions no longer reify culture, when lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge, and when the process of how knowledge is constructed and translated between groups located within nonsymmetrical relations of power is questioned. (Gonzalez, p. 42)

There are many books that address the topics of diverse families and issues of social justice (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013). For instance, *Magic Beads* (Nielsen-Fernlund, 2007) is a story that addresses the socioeconomic issues of poverty and homelessness as the young girl in the story lives with her mother in a shelter since they have left her father due to domestic violence. *A Family is a Family is a Family* (O'Leary, 2016) portrays the love and care of all different kinds of families including children living with grandparents, stepsiblings, same-gendered parents, and foster families. *A New Life* (Khan, 2009) is a short illustrated novel that describes the experiences of eight-year-old Khadija and her older brother, Hamza, and their family, who have emigrated from Pakistan to Ontario. *Magic Beads* is available in French, although *A Family is a Family is a Family* and *A New Life* have yet to be translated to French. As I have noted earlier in this study, it was more challenging to find books for this study in French. There is a need for more translations of picture books from French to English and vice-versa. Edwards and Saltman (2010) describe as they cite a study by Gagnon (1987),

There is a lack of communication between English and French publishers which needs to be remedied...Children's books published in Canada should be available in both official languages. Canada has excellent authors and illustrators as well as translators. We should begin by recognizing national talent more thorough mutual translations. (p. 223)

For example, I had difficulty finding visual texts by Canadian writers of Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Indian origin that were available in French (although there are many in English). *Malaika's Costume* will be translated into French in the spring of 2017. Author Nadia Hohn (2016), who is also a French teacher, writes on her blog,

*En fin, j'aurai un livre de la culture
antillaise et du carnaval que je peux utiliser
quand j'enseigne le français*

Finally, I will have a book about
Caribbean culture and carnival that I
can use when I teach French

para. 11

I am certain that such texts, if available in both French and English, would be of high interest to the teachers and children in these classroom communities.

One of the tensions that exists is how to make spaces for all of the languages and stories in a classroom to ensure that each child feels a sense of belonging. This raises questions for curriculum and pedagogy, such as: *How may we bring together visual arts and minority language education?* Research that fosters relationships between families and school has demonstrated that children and families, particularly those who are minoritized, gain a sense of empowerment when they are included in multilingual projects such as creating identity texts and reading dual- language books (see Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011; Naqvi, 2009). Reciprocal learning takes place when teachers also learn from families. Connecting children with minority writers and illustrators is also empowering (Jeevandam, 2013). Imagine the possibilities that could open up for children such as Aleem, Marjeena, and Rukshana by reading and meeting Pakistani Canadian writers and artists or for Jalindu and Arjunu to meet with Sri Lankan Canadian writers and artists. And what if the teachers, children, and families were able to engage in work that brought them together and crossed the border that divides school and home? “The very act of transcending the boundaries of the classroom in itself ruptures flows of circulating discourses of deficiency and difference” (González, 2005, p. 43). One example of connecting to community beyond the classroom was the teachers’ and children’s positive response to the visit of a local Haitian artist who shared his paintings and spoke of various artistic styles. What could emerge from further collaborations with artists and community members?

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how children and teachers engaged together in responding to literature and creating texts. As the children and teachers read and discussed various texts, they also came to know one another on a different level. In this way, the community of each classroom was always “in the making” (Greene, 1995, p. 39). Of central importance is the way that children and teachers nourished their relationships with one another by exchanging ideas. Palmer (2007) writes,

Knowing of any sort is relational, animated by a desire to come into deeper community with what we know. Knowing is a human way to seek relationship and, in the process, to have encounters and exchanges that will inevitably alter us. (p. 55)

In the concluding chapter, I will revisit the research questions of the study and discuss implications for pedagogy and future inquiry in language and literacy education.

8

VISUALIZING HOPE: MAPPING POSSIBLE DESTINATIONS

Hope is kept alive by our desire for change, our refusal to ignore or passively accept things as they are.

Möller & Allen, 2000, p. 181

This study explored young children's responses to contemporary Canadian picture books in an urban public school in Montréal. In this concluding chapter, I review the findings of the study in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter One. I also discuss the ways that this study contributes to new knowledge about children's literacy practices in diverse classrooms. Finally, I explore the implications for pedagogy and future inquiry in language and literacy education. This study sheds light on the ways that children and teachers engage deeply and creatively with the words and images of picture books; in doing so relationships within the classroom are deepened through new understandings of life experiences. Overall this study highlights, as Freire (2004, p. 2) describes "the need for an education in hope" characterized by a "desire for change" (Möller & Allen, 2000, p. 181) ignited by deep engagements with visual literature. Counter-narratives in visual literature for children offer "a more expansive landscape upon which to dream" of possibilities for future destinations (Myers, 2014, para. 14).

Engaging deeply with contemporary visual texts is challenging and yet experiences of reading together create rich possibilities for children to make connections with others, while also gaining self-awareness and imaginative ways of seeing and thinking (Meek, 1992). Freire (2004) writes that one of the tasks of the educator is to “unveil opportunities for hope, no matter the obstacles. After all, without hope there is little we can do” (p. 3). Educators and scholars such as Freire, hooks, and Ayers have noted that hope for change within education involves a struggle. In the words of hooks (2003), “Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness” (p. xiv). Along the same lines as hooks, Ayers (2002) writes about struggle and hope in education,

Education is, of course, an arena of struggle as well as hope—struggle, because it stirs in us the need to reconsider everything we have wrought, to look at the world anew, to question what we have created, to wonder what is worthwhile for human beings to know and experience, to justify or criticize or bombard or maintain or build up or overthrow everything before us—and hope because we gesture toward the future, toward the impending, toward the coming of the new. (p. xiii)

I began the study with an interest in collaborating with teachers in classrooms and working with children while engaging with contemporary Canadian literature. In particular, I was interested in how children and teachers would engage with texts that provided counter-narratives to mainstream texts, thus contributing to rich encounters in the diverse classrooms. We are living in times of change and we need stories to help us make sense of the world. Johnston (2006) writes that,

Our challenge as educators will be to find ways to bring these complex international and interdependent sensibilities into the lives of students and to recognize how new reading practices can help us to become more engaged with the challenges of living in a world of difference, discontinuity, and multiplicity. (p. 128)

This research study examines the role of stories in contributing to children’s literacy experiences through a focus on what has come to be known as visual literature. The selected texts, picture books by authors Kyo Maclear, Dany Laferrière, and Chieri Uegaki and illustrators Isabelle Arsenault, Frédéric Normandin, and Stéphane Jorisch offered opportunities for engaging with new

ways of seeing. My focus in the analysis was on the ways that children responded to the literature and how the teachers supported them in engaging with the complexity of the texts. As I have described throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, my interpretations of this study are organized around the interrelated themes **All My Ideas Flow**, **Listening with Your Heart**, and **We're All Part of the Story**.

EMBRACING COMMUNITY IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXTS

Within an intercultural context, such as Garden Meadows, the opportunities for learning from one another are enhanced by the diverse voices that each child and teacher brings to the classroom.

On June 23, 2014, the last day of school, I went to the school for a final interview with one of the teachers and to take down an art display of children's drawings in the lobby. School was closing for summer and excitement rang through the air. The principal Madame Émond announced on the intercom that she wished everyone an enjoyable summer vacation before playing a Bob Marley and The Wailers song, *Jamming*, on the intercom speakers for all the children and teachers to hear as they gathered up their books and bags to leave the school. Madame Émond walked out of the office to greet students in the hallways while the joyful music played over the speakers. I smiled, as the lyrics of the Jamaican song seemed like such a positive note on which to end the school year. The lyrics seemed to represent the vibrant community of the school, where children and teachers of diverse backgrounds come together to learn in a playful and inclusive environment,

Ooh, yeah! All right!

We're jammin':

I wanna jam it wid you.

We're jammin', jammin',

And I hope you like jammin', too.

Marley & The Wailers, 1977

I was filled with emotions on that day, as I reflected on how the children and teachers had warmly welcomed me into their classrooms and we had all made a journey together through the stories we shared. The environment of this school, with its multicultural community, one in which each child brought distinctive funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005), created a rich space for observing and learning from the unique strengths of each child (Carini, 1979). As a researcher, I was honoured to be a part of this learning community and I learned from listening to and researching *with* the children and teachers. I also learned a great deal in relation to my research question. I was focused on listening to children's responses to contemporary Canadian literature in French primary classrooms. This classroom-based qualitative research study has explored the following broad question,

- *How may listening to children's responses to contemporary picture books, in word and image, inform our understanding of young children's engagements with literature in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms?*

Then, within this question, I have also considered the following sub-question,

- *What is the role of the teacher in supporting children's engagements with picture books?*

In response to the first question, this study has explored ways of listening to children's voices. The context of the literacy project involving story read-alouds and extended response activities with picture books permitted time and space to listen to children's voices. Following the ideas of visual methodology, childhood studies, and the work of Reggio Emilia educators, listening entailed being attentive to the different ways that children express themselves. This project explored children's responses to a particular selection of six Canadian picture books. The discussions and activities around the books generated rich dialogue, innovative visual responses and deepened a sense of community while children and teachers learned more about one another. The teachers played an important role in enhancing children's engagements as they, both teachers and children, worked together to co-construct meaning and explore the multiplicity of the stories and responses.

The relevance of this study responds to the context of teaching and research in literacy practices that takes into consideration the need to listen to children within diverse classroom communities (Davies, 2014; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Hasebe-Ludt, 1999; Naqvi, 2009; Paley, 1997).

With a focus on visual literature, this study addressed the need to pay attention to children's multiple ways of expressing their identities. As noted by Kendrick (2004), "there is an urgent need for including in school curricula multimodal representations which allow for the expression of a much fuller range of human emotion and experience" (p. 113). I will answer in greater detail the research questions as part of considering contributions to new knowledge.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

This study contributes to new knowledge in several different areas. These include the potential for visual literature to illuminate the significance of place and identity in children's lives, and the possibilities for enhancing pedagogy and relationality through engagements with literature.

VISUAL LITERATURE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY

This study has examined the responses of children and teachers reading picture books within the specific context of two classrooms in an urban public school in Montréal. The study contributes to the body of knowledge in literacy studies in the Canadian and Québec context, as it is located in the heart of multilingual and multicultural Montréal. The children's and teachers' responses to diverse voices in the texts by Canadian authors Laferrière, Maclear, and Uegaki bring to light the impact of reading practices within "a world of difference, discontinuity, and multiplicity" (Johnston, 2006, p. 128). As such, the perspectives of the children in the study revealed that they were interested in having the opportunity to share their funds of knowledge and personal experiences (Moll, 2005). By reading and imagining places in the stories, both real, such as Haiti, and imagined, such as Bloomsberry, the children and teachers reflected on their relationships and connections to place. The variety of visual representations that children made in response to stories demonstrates the power of *visuality*: "how vision is constructed in various ways" (Rose, 2012, p. 2). According to Foster (1998) it is important to consider "how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein" (as cited in Rose, 2012, p. 2). My study contributes to knowledge about identity as I have discussed, particularly in Chapters Five and Seven, the ways

that children responded to the picture books by sharing their stories in words and images.

Returning to the notion of children's literature as maps, Myers (2014) has observed that "representations of young people of color are harder and harder to find" (para. 5). This study has demonstrated the ways in which children responded to literature that included representations of children of diverse ethnic and cultural heritage, and how the children in the classrooms shared about their own identities as they connected to the stories. Adichie (2009) mentions that we must be aware of "how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, especially as children". In her TED Talk lecture, she described how as a child in Nigeria she was primarily reading books with white characters of European heritage and this impacted her way of imagining literature,

I learned that books had to be about things with which I could not personally identify...although things changed when I discovered African books. They weren't as easy to find, but because of writers such as...Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that girls like me, with skin the colour of chocolate and whose kinky hair did not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. (Adichie, 2009)

This research study concurs with the work in children's literacy studies that demonstrates the ways children can find a sense of belonging through engagement with literature while also learning to respect others (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Feurverger, 1994; Möller & Allen, 2000; Naqvi, 2009; Paley, 1997). What make this study distinctive is the particular focus on young children reading texts by Canadian authors and illustrators and how they then imagined themselves in relation to those texts. This study has highlighted the way in which, as Sipe (2008) observes, "ability to imagine a different society may be partly based on the ability to impose a new narrative construction on the social facts at our disposal: to tell a different story...reading literature is a highly political, transformative action" (p. 246).

Further, the study has revealed that there is a need to include an even greater variety of stories in classrooms to reflect the diversity of the children. Genishi and Dyson (2009) invite us to consider how including more literature, including those written in vernaculars such as African

American English, would have a positive impact for children. When Anne Dyson read Clifton's picture book *Three Wishes* (1992) with Tionna, the young girl demonstrated through "her deliberate changing of intonation and rhythm when moving from 'What will you wish?' to 'Whatcha gonna wish?'"... "her ear for voices and sociolinguistic flexibility" (pp. 31-32) by using both standard English and African American Language (AAL). And yet, when asked her opinion about the book, Tionna stated that "some words need to be fixed" (p. 32). Tionna's ability to code-switch was not valued in the classroom where the official curriculum focused on formal talk,

Imagine, though, that Tionna had had the opportunity to hear characters speak in picture books and poetry that captured diverse societal voices, including voices that sounded like her family members and her neighbors. Imagine too that talk about these voices had been a common feature of her classroom life. In such circumstances, Tionna's response to Clifton's writing might have been different. (p. 32)

This notion of transforming society through literature could be explored further through further research with children in a variety of contexts and reading literature from diverse national and international sources (United Nations, 1989). In the Australian context, Bradford (2003) notes the increase in picture books by Indigenous authors. She notes,

The protection and celebration of culture, finds its expression in the reclamation of stories and languages, often realised in the form of bilingual and mixed-language texts for children...so offering Aboriginal children an empowered sense of subjectivity and non-Aboriginal children an experience of cultural difference. (p. 69)

CHILDREN'S VOICES

This study also contributes to understanding the ways that children's voices may be heard through literary response. With a focus on responding to visual literature, the study enabled children to express themselves using different modes of communication, including images. I have documented how children connected to one another and to their teachers as they shared their responses. In this way, the study has pointed to the ways that listening fosters connection and helps relationships to

grow in the classroom. Rinaldi (2006) reminds us to “‘listen’ to life in all its facets, listen to others with generosity, quickly perceive how the acts of listening is an essential act of communication” (as cited in Davies, 2014, p. 12).

By listening to children’s responses and stories, I also came to understand that children express themselves in different ways. For instance, we need to pay more attention to children whose voices are quiet or appear to be silenced (Spyrou, 2015). Responding through visual work fostered a sense of contemplation as the teachers and children listened to the voices in the literature while finding their own voices (Greene, 1995; Neilson Glenn, 2010). Listening to children’s voices revealed their capabilities in making sense of stories, grappling with the complexity of the images and words (Meek, 1982). As Sipe (2008) observes, the “intellectual, emotional and social sensitivities of children are marvelous and boundless” (p. 245). This study has built on previous literature in childhood studies by further exploring the ways in which children’s responses to literature demonstrate their aesthetic engagement through the use of imagination.

Dyson (2001) describes the ways that children bring their own experiences of language and literacy that is often “of little interest, little relevance” in the classroom as “when children enter the school’s atmosphere, they are often fixed within its hierarchical patterns” (p. 14). Although the formal school curriculum may not always acknowledge the depth of children’s knowledge, through closely examining the conversations, play, and multimodal texts of children, research that listens to children’s one hundred languages, their resources, and their knowledges sheds light on the complexity of their multilayered worlds.

Falchi et al. (2014), drawing on the work of Dyson, note that while our classrooms are becoming more diverse, the curriculum in many schools, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods, is “tightly regulated often because children are viewed through normative lenses as ‘underperforming’ and constrained in terms of their multilingual and multimodal literacy practices” (p. 346).

PEDAGOGY AND RELATIONALITY THROUGH LITERATURE

This study has contributed to knowledge in the area of pedagogy through literature. I have explored the teachers' engagements with literature and how their own interests in reading diverse texts enabled connections with the children in their classrooms. Each of the teachers I worked with had a unique style of teaching, and yet the most important aspect was the way that teachers supported the children in gaining confidence in their own abilities to interpret texts. A deeper connection with the literature and with one another was achieved through the caring relationships that teachers fostered with the children in their classrooms and the flexibility that they had in teaching through literature, their courage to take risks, and their respect for children. Both teachers I worked with spoke of their passion for teaching and showed their love of the children in their classrooms. For instance, Madame Mai made her classroom feel like a home for the children by making the reading area cozy with a sofa, carpet, and many books to read. Madame Lili spoke of her inspiration from Gabrielle Roy's (1977) novel *Ces enfants de ma vie* (*Children of My Heart*), that focuses on the relationships between children and teachers, and how she always reminded herself to treat the children in her class the way she would like her own children to be treated. As noted by Palmer (2007), "connections made by good teachers are not held in their methods but in their hearts—meaning *heart* in the ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge on the human self" (p. 11, emphasis in original).

The teachers played an important role in engaging the children with the selected visual texts. In particular, Madame Lili and Madame Mai spoke of how the stories enabled children to respect differences. The findings have also revealed challenges with reading sophisticated picture books with poetic language and complex images, suggesting that language and literacy education courses for teachers could focus more on these areas in order to support children in navigating these complexities. Palmer (2007) observes that in education, we rarely discuss the challenges of teaching and yet teaching is filled with complexities,

First, the subjects we teach are always large and complex as life, so our knowledge of them is always flawed and partial. No matter how we devote ourselves to reading and research, teaching requires a command of content that always eludes our grasp.

Second, the students we teach are larger than life and even more complex. (p. 2)

Therefore, the importance of teachers knowing themselves and their students cannot be underestimated (Greene, 1995; Palmer, 2007). When the teachers reflected on their literacy histories in the interviews, they looked back on their early experiences. Meek (1992) suggests,

We have to draw our own maps, trace our own histories, acknowledge our own debts and consider ways not taken. Our literacy autobiographies reveal riches and gaps, but these narratives are not tales of solitary journeys. We were always in dialogue with others—those who taught us to read, those for whom we wrote, who lent us books, shaped our preferences, encouraged us, forbade us even...(p. 234)

The children's responses to texts enabled teachers to learn more about their interests and personal experiences. The rich dialogue that took place between teachers and children demonstrated the power of literature to stimulate thinking. The time that the teachers spent reading and selecting the texts was key to their engagement with the literature in the classroom with the children. Martin (2003) observes,

The best teachers of literature are those for whom reading is important in their lives, and who read more than the texts they teach. Readers know how to trust the text so that it stands in its own right, and does not need to be something to get somewhere else. A poem is worth reading for its own sake, not simply in order to teach something about poetry. Being a reader of literature gives a teacher the confidence to teach powerfully. (as cited in Cremin et al., 2008, p. 19)

Furthermore, the study has suggested that teachers' aesthetic experiences with literature contribute to the joy they share in reading with children. The teachers were surprised at how much the children actually enjoyed listening to stories and how long they could spend discussing the texts. I argue for an increased focus on creative literary engagements for pleasure in classrooms as

well as a greater recognition of the significance of teachers' reading practices as "this can only be beneficial for future readers whose diverse interests and reading preferences deserve to be honoured and extended" (Cremin et al., 2008, p. 19). Meek (1992) observed the importance of encouraging children to engage with visual texts by allowing sufficient time to look and talk about the stories and their responses,

Children treat pictures with a kind of searching wonder. As they look, they have a particular need to pause, to seek things out. Artists understand this; they do it, too. So, they give the young readers a perspective, a place from which to look. Children who are encouraged to linger, to explore and to say what they see, teach the adults, who are inclined to rush on with the story, more than their glance grasps about the world of the artist and the writer. So together, readers, artists and writers create the world of literate seeing. (p. 117)

This study resonates with the findings of work that highlights the role that teachers play in fostering literacy practices. Falchi et al. (2014) note that teachers' flexibility within the classroom played an important role in their study "when literate practices made space for multiple modes of expression" (p. 347). Möller and Allen (2000) have also explored the importance of considering the spaces created for enabling children to respond to literature within a "collective response development zone" that brings together the text, reader response, and critical literacy (p. 149). As in previous work on literary response (Sipe, 2008), the connection and relationships that teachers fostered with children were central to the ways that children engaged with reading and creating. The guidance of a teacher is key, as Möller and Allen (2000) note, "it would be irresponsible simply to give children books that arouse intense emotions without providing time, space, and guidance as they interpret the content and work through strong feelings" (p. 149). As Rukshana read and talked about her feelings regarding the poem in *Le baiser mauve de Vava*, she felt compassionate for the young boy who wrote the poem to his friend Vava. By engaging with and talking about the text, Rukshana was able to express her feelings. Möller and Allen (2000) write of the emotional impact of engaging deeply with literature, suggesting the implications for social justice through response to

difficult texts. Tamika's poem, written with "honesty and poetic possibility for a better world, one in which fear is not discounted, but neither is hope—figurative or real" (p. 181) expressed her personal and critical response to *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1987),

I don't like how Black people are treated

And I want everyone to be friends

In this world

Like our Martin Luther King

And like each other—

People.

I want Martin Luther King to come back alive....

Möller & Allen, 2000, p. 181

The Freirean concept of "a pedagogy of hope" has influenced and inspired educators to consider the possibilities for overcoming difficulties. Smits and Naqvi (2014) encourage us to consider new ways of thinking about "radical hope",

...as weaving certain ways of being and acting in the world: the exercise of practical reason, of courage, of imagination and of acting well towards others...such a change in thinking about the self involves a recognition—and practice of relationality: that is to understand and confront precariousness requires a sense of oneself as a person who is indelibly linked with others through bonds of caring and responsibility. (p. xiii)

Within contemporary society, where change is constant, more work is needed that examines relationality and literary response as teachers and children engage in the practices of making sense of the world through literature. There is a need to understand peaceful ways of relating to one another in our diverse world and to work together to foster understandings within and beyond borders.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY AND FUTURE INQUIRY

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY WITH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

An aesthetic engagement with picture books contributes to children's imagination and creativity, enabling children to become 'strong poets' as they create their own responses. The teachers and children showed an interest in reading contemporary Canadian texts that were new to their classrooms. The choices that teachers make in selecting and reading literature have an impact on the stories that children may hear and know (Strong-Wilson, 2008). By introducing a wide variety of texts that focus on issues and themes relevant for children, the classroom becomes a space for rich dialogue. Children develop broader understandings of interpersonal relationships and community through literature. I am drawing on Lancy's (1993) statement that "communities are held together by the interaction of their members" (p. 4). Returning to the idea of "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006), this study has illustrated the ways that literature provokes imaginative thinking about the ways that individuals are all connected to one another. Within our increasingly diverse society and immigration flows, there is a need for stories that provide all children with the possibilities to imagine and dream. Furthermore, this study has implications for engaging playfully with stories in early childhood classrooms. An example of the playfulness in this study that enhanced the community is when Madame Lili and the children in her class played with the words of the story *Le baiser mauve de Vava* to write their own poems. Another example is when, in response to *Virginia Wolf*, Madame Mai asked her class to imagine themselves as different animals and invited them to think about where they would fly away to if they were sad. The findings of this study are consistent with the work highlighted by Paley (1997) that stories provide "narrative continuity", a vehicle for our "instinctive need to concentrate on a connected set of images and dramatic events" (p. 74). Future work could further examine the need for "language and cultures of minority students...to be recognized and promoted in schools and in the curriculum" (Feurverger, 1994, p. 127). As in the work by researchers such as Cummins, Moll, Taylor, Naqvi, and Feurverger, there is an urgent need to connect families and schools. One way of doing this is in collaboratively creating stories together and learning from one another.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY PEDAGOGY

This study has focused on children's responses to literature, particularly through their visual work. The responses of the children indicate an urgent need for bridging connections between school and children's funds of knowledges. As this research has indicated, children co-construct meaning through creative engagements with literature, particularly when they participate in expressing their voices through the visual arts by drawing, painting, and discussing ideas related to their own passions and interests.

This study also has implications for slowing down and taking time to foster enjoyment and playful experiences with language and literacy (Hasebe-Ludt, 1999) and visual arts (Anning & Ring, 2004). In the words of Paley (1997),

Let's face it, what school usually does is continually interrupt any attempt on the part of the children to recapture the highly focused intensity of play. What we need to do is help them—and ourselves—get back on track. (p. 75)

As discussed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, the children and teachers noted the time that is required for deep engagement with literature and visual arts. Engaging deeply involves slowing down to look at the richness of the texts. Furthermore, children need to have more time to fully enjoy creating their responses to literary texts, whether through painting or poems.

LIMITATIONS

This classroom study has focused on work with two teachers in two classrooms in one elementary school. The study took place over a four-month period in the classrooms. The number of teachers and classrooms and the length of time are both considerations. For instance, spending more time in the research context could shed further light on the literacy practices of children and teachers. In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley (1997) documents the entire school year with the children reading and responding to stories by Leo Lionni, allowing for an in-depth examination of the children's relationships to one another and to the stories.

A study with more teachers would provide different perspectives on how various teachers navigate the complexities of teaching with contemporary Canadian picture books. Exploring the engagements of pre-service teachers reading literature in diverse French classrooms could provide further insights into the use of literature in teacher education programs. A longer study (e.g. a classroom ethnography) could further illuminate the role of contemporary literature in classrooms and could be a focus for future research, including comparatively, across Canadian contexts and diverse classrooms.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A longitudinal study, over one year or longer, could further enhance understandings of teachers and children's engagements with literature in the classrooms. Reading literature with children across grade levels within a school, for example, from kindergarten to Grade Six, could also extend our understanding of engagement and literary response.

Stein and Newfeld (2003) emphasize the pedagogical implications of multiliteracies for “reclaiming the classroom as a transformatory space which has the potential to enable students’ processes of becoming as fully expressive human beings” (p. 2842). Future work is needed in the classrooms and communities in Montréal, across Canada, and in international contexts that would explore how the classroom may be transformed by bringing children’s funds of knowledges (Moll, 2005) and languages into the classroom Hélot (2014). Further research could also examine multiliteracies pedagogy through multilingual Canadian stories that are in French and minority languages such as Urdu, Hindi, and Mandarin, as well as indigenous languages such as Cree and Inuktitut (Cummins & Early, 2011; Kenner, 2000; Naqvi, 2009; Noori, 2009; Wilson & Kamana, 2009).

Given that many of the children in this study were multilingual, it would be beneficial to work with a multilingual research team where children could speak in different languages to the researcher(s) (Maguire et al., 2005). Although I have previously studied Spanish and I learned some greetings and words in Urdu and Tamil at the time of the study, my knowledge of these

languages is very basic. It would be empowering for children to have the opportunity to speak their home languages, such as Urdu, Chinese, Arabic, or Tamil, to one another, to family members who may volunteer in a school setting, and to the researcher(s). A multilingual research study with contemporary children's literature could shed more light on children's engagements with literacy practices the classroom community.

Finally, given that the topic of families often arose in the children's responses to story, as I discussed in Chapter Five, it would be important for future research to look at the relationships between school and home in order to enhance engagements with contemporary Canadian literature. The perspectives of parents and families, particularly those from marginalized populations, could add rich perspectives to this research. For instance, family members may have unique insights into the children's interests and knowledges that could inform teaching practices. Fostering home and school relationship could also enhance and foster intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. Such research could take place in a variety of spaces including public libraries, university libraries, or community centres, as well as in schools.

CONCLUSION

I have explored the experiences of two teachers and the children in their French classrooms reading Canadian picture books. Through this research, I am reminded that we must always look carefully and listen to see and appreciate the stories around us. Learning to see takes practice. The research has suggested the complex ways in which children and teachers come to know more about themselves and each other through literary experiences.



Figure 51. Koi Fish at Japanese Garden in Montréal's *Jardin botanique*.

On my last day with the children in the Grades One and Two classes, on a Friday in late June, we visited Montréal's *Jardin botanique*. This was a journey that took us outside of the classroom, bringing us together in a new experience and space. The field trip was an extended activity after reading *Le kimono de Suki*. After reading the story, and before visiting, we had looked at photographs of the Japanese Garden and the children had talked about what they would see. In the garden, we explored the pathways, ponds, bridges, and iris flowers. There was also a special exhibit on kimonos and a room filled with Japanese calligraphy. When we reached the pond, everyone stopped to watch the koi fish swimming peacefully. The koi fish, a symbol of friendship, remind us of the need for us to care for one another. As the children and adults looked into the water, we all watched in admiration at the beauty and elegance of the koi fish swimming together. It was a special moment in which we were all joyfully observing the fish. Then, we walked across a bridge, one by one, to the other side of the water and continued along the path. The walk through the gardens, looking at the natural sights around us, was a visual and sensory experience. The children and teachers observed closely as we walked and talked together, experiencing stories in a different space and place as an extension of the visual literature we read in the classroom.

Following the study, I am now left with many more questions about the ways that we as educators can ensure that children's rights are respected and understood. A key one is the right for all children to have the opportunities they deserve to access diverse information, including picture books, from national and international sources that contribute to their well-being (United Nations, 1989, Article 17). *How could we ensure that children in all communities, including rural and indigenous communities, as well as urban contexts, have access to a rich variety of stories by Canadian authors and international authors? What new stories will the children (and teachers) encounter that might spark their interest, enhance an awareness of social justice issues, and further contribute to their sense of community?*

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APPENDIX I

LETTER OF INVITATION TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear (Name of Principal),

My name is Heather Phipps. I am a PhD Candidate in Curriculum and Literacy at McGill University in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. I would like to invite an elementary teacher from your school, along with his or her students, to participate in my PhD project ***Visualizing Social Change: Reading Multicultural Canadian Picture Books.***

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of the research is to engage children in reading and responding to Canadian multicultural stories, specifically picture books. The research will explore ways in which children interpret multicultural picture books within an urban Montréal classroom. The study will also explore approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy through the shared reading of multicultural Canadian children's literature in the classroom and support reflection on teaching practices.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

- The children and teacher will have the opportunity to read and discover diverse Canadian children's literature and to engage in multi-literacy practices in response to the texts.
- The children, teacher, and researcher will collaboratively engage in responding to the themes and issues presented in both the words and artwork in the picture books.
- The collaboration between the teacher, researcher, and children will offer opportunities for discussion of the distinctiveness of the visual and verbal text in selected Canadian multicultural literature and will offer children opportunities to express their ideas and feelings about the literature through creative language and literacy projects.
- The study promotes multi-literacy practices, culturally responsive pedagogy and community building through engagements with diverse literature relevant to children in the Canadian context.
- The shared reading of multicultural Canadian picture books in the classroom will provide opportunities for children to actively participate in dialogue and literacy practices related to social justice.
- The study aims to contribute to the community of the classroom by recognizing the diversity of voices in the classroom and in the stories.

WHAT WILL THE PROJECT INVOLVE?

Participation for the teacher will involve: **two initial meetings** where the teacher and researcher will discuss children's literature, pedagogy, and select picture books for the classroom; **teaching selected multicultural stories** in the classroom; **writing in a reflective journal** on a weekly basis throughout the project; the collection of audio-recorded data: **2 (30 minute) audio-recorded teacher interviews** where the teacher will be invited to reflect on teaching with multicultural literature in the classroom and the role of stories in building community; As part of the research, I will conduct **participant observation** during language arts instruction (approximately 3 days/week) in the classroom over the 3-4 months of the project. I will also offer to collaborate with the teacher on preparing and co-facilitating literacy activities in the classroom. Part of this classroom study will involve documenting children's learning by collecting work that the children and teacher would be willing to share, in response to the texts and related themes (projects, drawings, photography, children's stories). The documentation of children's work will also encourage reflection on learning and pedagogy. I would like to audio-record children participating in classroom activities related to the stories and invite children to participate in audio-recorded interview discussions in small groups.

The teacher, parents/legal tutors, and children will understand that:

- Participation in the project is voluntary and they may withdraw at anytime during the research study.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of the teacher, students, and school.
- All information will be treated confidentially and only discussed with my faculty advisor.
- The results of this research will be used in my PhD thesis, presentations and publications, and for educational purposes.

If you have any questions please contact me by email or phone (514) 268-3179 heather.phipps@mail.mcgill.ca or contact my faculty advisor Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson by email teresa.strong-wilson@mcgill.ca. I will contact you within a month to find out if a teacher at your school may be interested in participating in this research.

Sincerely,

Heather Phipps

APPENDIX II

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR TEACHER

Dear (Teacher),

My name is Heather Phipps. I am a PhD Candidate in Literacy and Curriculum at McGill University in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. I am interested in understanding how children read and respond to the words and images in Canadian multicultural picture books and how their shared understandings may contribute to building community in the classroom. I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research project *Visualizing Social Change: Reading Multicultural Canadian Picture Books*.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of the research is to engage children in reading and responding to Canadian multicultural stories, specifically picture books. The research will explore ways in which children interpret multicultural picture books within an urban Montréal classroom. The study will also explore approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy through the shared reading of multicultural Canadian children's literature in the classroom and support reflection on teaching practices.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

- You and the children in your class will have the opportunity to read and discover diverse Canadian children's literature and to engage in multi-literacy practices in response to the texts.
- The children, teacher, and researcher will collaboratively engage in responding to the themes and issues presented in both the words and artwork in the picture books.
- The collaboration between the teacher, researcher, and children will offer opportunities for discussion of the distinctiveness of the visual and verbal text in selected Canadian multicultural literature and will offer children opportunities to express their ideas and feelings about the literature through creative language and literacy projects.
- The study promotes multi-literacy practices, culturally responsive pedagogy and community building through engagements with diverse literature relevant to children in the Canadian context.
- The shared reading of multicultural Canadian picture books in the classroom will provide opportunities for children to actively participate in dialogue and literacy practices related to social justice.
- The study aims to contribute to the community of the classroom by recognizing the diversity of voices in the classroom and in the stories.
- What am I asking you to do?
- I am inviting you to participate in this project over the course of 3-4 months of the school year by collaboratively planning to teach a selection of multicultural Canadian children's books in the classroom, in English and/or French (depending on your classroom context). We will meet together to discuss a variety of literature and you will receive copies of the picture books that you are interested in teaching in your classroom.

WHAT AM I ASKING YOU TO DO?

I am inviting you to participate in this project over the course of 3-4 months of the school year by collaboratively planning to teach a selection of multicultural Canadian children's books in the classroom, in English and/or French (depending on your classroom context). **We will meet together to discuss a variety of literature and you will receive copies of the picture books that you are interested in teaching in your classroom.**

Participation for the teacher will involve: **two initial meetings** where the teacher and researcher will discuss children's literature, pedagogy, and select picture books for the classroom; **teaching selected multicultural stories** in the classroom; **writing in a reflective journal** on a weekly basis throughout the project; the collection of audio-recorded data: **2 (30 minute) audio-recorded teacher interviews** where the teacher will be invited to reflect on teaching with multicultural literature in the classroom and the role of stories in building community; As part of the research, I will conduct **participant observation** during language arts instruction (approximately 3 days/week) in the classroom over the 3-4 months of the project. I will also offer to collaborate with the teacher on preparing and co-facilitating literacy activities in the classroom. Part of this classroom study will involve documenting children's learning by collecting work that the children and teacher would be willing to share, in response to the texts and related themes (projects, drawings, photography, children's stories). The documentation of children's work will also encourage reflection on learning and pedagogy. I would like to audio-record children participating in classroom activities related to the stories and invite children to participate in audio-recorded interview discussions in small groups.

The purpose of the participant observation would be to gain an understanding of children's responses to the multicultural literature and to support teacher reflection and practice. We will meet together on a regular basis to discuss the ongoing literacy project over the course of the study.

CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time during the project, without any consequences or need for explanation. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed and not used, unless you agree otherwise in writing.

It is common in research studies for participants' identities to be anonymous so as to protect their privacy. I will protect your privacy and the privacy of your school by using pseudonyms and other means to protect the confidentiality of the school's location in my thesis, conferences, or published work.

I plan to use the data in this study for my PhD thesis, conference presentations, publications and teaching. Portions of the research may also be shared on a website.

Data will be accessible only to myself, and my faculty advisor (Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson). I will store the data in password-protected files on my password-protected computer and a password-protected external harddrive.

If you have any questions please contact me by email or phone (514) 268-3179 heather.phipps@mail.mcgill.ca or contact my faculty advisor Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson by email teresa.strong-wilson@mcgill.ca

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this research project.

YES

I agree to be audio-recorded during interviews that will be transcribed for data analysis.

YES NO

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be kept by the researcher.

APPENDIX III

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR TEACHER (FRENCH)

Cher enseignant(e),

Je m'appelle Heather Phipps. Je suis candidate au doctorat au Département d'études intégrées en éducation à l'Université McGill. Je suis intéressée à savoir comment les enfants lisent et répondent aux mots et images dans les albums multiculturels canadiens et comment l'expérience de lecture partagée peut contribuer à l'appartenance communautaire des enfants de la classe. Ainsi, je vous invite à participer à mon projet de recherche doctorale ***Visualizing Social Change: Reading Multicultural Canadian Picture Books.***

OBJECTIF

Ce projet de recherche a pour but d'engager les enfants à la lecture des histoires multiculturelles canadiennes, plus précisément les albums. Cette recherche explorera les façons dont les enfants comprennent les histoires dans un contexte de classe montréalais. Par ailleurs, elle permettra d'étudier des approches de pédagogie adaptée à la culture des enfants d'origines diverses. Enfin, cette recherche visera à soutenir la réflexion de la pratique enseignante.

LES BIENFAITS DE LA RECHERCHE:

- Vous et vos élèves aurez l'occasion de lire et de découvrir la littérature de jeunesse canadienne diversifiée.
- Les enfants, l'enseignant et la chercheuse travailleront en collaboration en lisant et en discutant des thèmes et contenus présents dans les images et les mots des albums.
- La collaboration entre l'enseignant, la chercheuse et les enfants offrira l'occasion de discuter des particularités des images et des textes écrits dans les livres multiculturels canadiens. De même, cela permettra aux enfants d'exprimer leurs idées et sentiments à travers les projets créatifs de langue et de littératie.
- Cette étude soutient les pratiques de littératie, de pédagogie culturellement adaptée et la création de communauté par la littérature jeunesse canadienne.
- La lecture partagée de ses histoires multiculturelles canadiennes donne la parole aux enfants qui seront encouragés à participer aux conversations et activités de littératie liés à la justice sociale.
- Le projet a pour but d'encourager une ouverture d'esprit, respect et reconnaissance envers la diversité des voix dans la classe et dans les histoires canadiennes multiculturelles.

QU'EST-CE QUE CELA IMPLIQUE?

Je vous invite à participer à cette recherche d'une durée de 3 à 4 mois. On fera une planification conjointe de l'enseignement des livres multiculturels canadiens. Le projet se déroulera en français ou en anglais (selon votre contexte d'enseignement). **On fera des rencontres afin de discuter la littérature et vous recevrez des livres que vous choisirez pour votre enseignement.**

La participation implique deux rencontres initiales pour discuter de la littérature, de la pédagogie et pour sélectionner des albums. Elle implique aussi l'enseignement des histoires multiculturelles, l'écriture un journal réflexif hebdomadaire pendant le projet. Vous serez invités à partager vos expériences et réflexions sur l'enseignement de la littérature multiculturelle et le rôle des histoires pour développer l'appartenance communautaire, lors de deux entrevues de 30 à 45 minutes. Je ferai l'observation participante pendant les arts langagiers (approximativement trois jours par semaine) dans votre classe pendant les trois ou quatre mois du projet. Je vous offre ma collaboration pour la planification des activités de littératie. La documentation d'apprentissage des enfants fait partie du projet tels que les dessins, les photos, les projets et textes écrits en classe liés à la littérature multiculturelle canadienne. La documentation permettra la réflexion sur l'apprentissage et la pédagogie. J'aimerais enregistrer des enfants pendant des activités en lien avec la littérature et je les inviterai à participer aux conversations en petits groupes. Je vais transcrire les enregistrements aux fins de la recherche. Le but de l'observation participante est de contribuer à notre compréhension de la façon dont les enfants lisent la littérature multiculturelle et d'encourager la réflexion et la pratique enseignante. Nous nous rencontrerons régulièrement afin de discuter du projet de littératie au cours des trois ou quatre mois, selon votre horaire.

PARTICIPATION ET CONFIDENTIALITÉ

Votre participation est volontaire. Si vous décidez de participer à la recherche, vous êtes libre de mettre fin à votre participation en tout temps au cours de cette recherche. Dans ce cas, les renseignements vous concernant seront détruits, à moins d'un consentement écrit de votre part. Comme c'est le cas dans ce genre d'étude, les noms des personnes ni de l'école seront mentionnés dans les rapports de recherches. Des pseudonymes seront données afin de protéger la confidentialité des participants et de l'école dans les rapports et discussions de recherche. Je prévois écrire et partager cette recherche dans le cadre de ma thèse, de congrès et d'enseignement de cours universitaires. Des parties de cette recherche seront peut-être partagée sur un site web.

Il est entendu que les renseignements recueillis lors des entrevues sont confidentiels et que seulement moi et ma directrice de thèse (Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson) auront accès à votre enregistrement et au contenu de sa transcription. Le matériel de recherche (enregistrement numérique et transcription codée) sera conservé séparément dans un dossier sur mon ordinateur et un disque dur externe et protégé par un mot de passe.

Si vous avez des questions à propos de la recherche, veuillez me contacter au (514) 268-3179 ou heather.phipps@mail.mcgill.ca ou contactez ma directrice de thèse, Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson, teresa.strong-wilson@mcgill.ca.

Si vous avez des questions au sujet de vos droits en tant que participant à cette recherche, vous pouvez contacter Lynda McNeil, (McGill Ethics Officer) au 514-398-6831 ou lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Votre signature signifie que vous comprenez les conditions de participation en la présente recherche et que vous en avez l'occasion de poser des questions et d'avoir des réponses.

Je reconnais d'avoir lu le présent formulaire de consentement et je consens volontairement à cette recherche.

OUI

Je permets l'enregistrement audio de ma voix pendant les entrevues qui seront transcrites à des fins de recherche.

OUI NON

Nom du participant

Signature

Date

Vous aurez une copie de cette formulaire et la chercheure aura également une copie.

APPENDIX IV

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR CHILDREN (PARENTAL CONSENT FORM)

Dear Parents or Legal Tutor,

My name is Heather Phipps. I am a PhD Candidate in Literacy and Curriculum at McGill University in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. I have invited your child's teacher and class to participate in my PhD research project *Visualizing Social Change: Reading Multicultural Canadian Picture Books*.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of the research is to engage children in reading and responding to Canadian multicultural stories, specifically picture books. The research will explore ways in which children interpret multicultural picture books within an urban Montréal classroom. The study will also explore approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy through the shared reading of multicultural Canadian children's literature in the classroom and support reflection on teaching practices.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

- The children and teacher will have the opportunity to read and discover diverse Canadian children's literature and to engage in multi-literacy practices in response to the texts.
- The children, teacher, and researcher will collaboratively engage in responding to the themes and issues presented in both the words and artwork in the picture books.
- The collaboration between the teacher, researcher, and children will offer opportunities for discussion of the distinctiveness of the visual and verbal text in selected Canadian multicultural literature and will offer children opportunities to express their ideas and feelings about the literature through creative language and literacy projects.
- The study promotes multi-literacy practices, culturally responsive pedagogy and community building through engagements with diverse literature relevant to children in the Canadian context.
- The shared reading of multicultural Canadian picture books in the classroom will provide opportunities for children to actively participate in dialogue and literacy practices related to social justice.
- The study aims to contribute to the community of the classroom by recognizing the diversity of voices in the classroom and in the stories.

HOW WILL STUDENTS BE INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY?

Over the course of 3-4 months, your child's teacher will be reading multicultural children's stories by Canadian authors and illustrators and planning literacy activities for the class. The stories and literature-based activities will be considered part of your child's regular language arts curriculum. He or she will not be doing additional work for the project. I will be observing classroom activities and working with the teacher and children throughout the research project. The participant observation will take place during language arts instruction (approximately 3 days/week). The purpose of the participant observation will be to gain an understanding of children's responses to the multicultural

literature and to support teacher reflection and practice.

Children will be invited to share their thoughts regarding the literature through writing, speaking, photography, and creative projects related to the themes of the stories. Part of this classroom research study will involve collecting the artifacts of the children's work, that the children and teacher would be willing to share, in response to the texts and related themes (projects, drawings, photography, children's stories). The documentation of children's work will also encourage reflection on learning and pedagogy.

Throughout the project, I will audio-record students working on classroom activities related to the picture books and interview discussions with children in small groups about the books. I would like to invite your child to participate in being audio-recorded during classroom activities and to participate in interview conversations, along with other children, about the multicultural literature. Only the researcher and the students being recorded will ever hear the actual audio recordings. These recordings will be transcribed and excerpts of them, as well as any work that your child is willing to share during the project, may be used for research and educational purposes. These audio recordings will not be used to give your child a classroom grade.

The names of students, teachers, and the school will not be mentioned in any research reports. Pseudonyms will be used for names of all participants in the project. Finally, even if you agree to have your child participate, you or your child may decide at any time to no longer participate in groups being audio taped or interviewed.

CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS

Your child's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to have your child participate, you or your child may withdraw at any time during this classroom-based research study without any consequences or need for explanation. Participation or refusal to participate in the study will have no influence on your child's marks or grades in school.

It is common in research studies for participants' identities to be confidential so as to protect their privacy. I will protect your privacy and the privacy of your school by using pseudonyms and other means to protect the confidentiality of the school's location in my thesis, conferences, or published work. I plan to use the data in this study for my PhD thesis, conference presentations, publications and teaching. Data will be accessible only to myself, and my faculty advisor (Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson). I will store the data securely on my password-protected computer and on an external hard-drive that is password-protected.

If you have any questions regarding the research, I can be reached at anytime by phone (514) 268-3179 or email heather.phipps@mail.mcgill.ca. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson by email teresa.strong-wilson@mail.mcgill.ca. If you have any questions or concerns about your or your child's rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Research Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Sincerely,

Heather Phipps

I will allow, my son/daughter, _____

To be audio-recorded during classroom activities that will be transcribed for data analysis.

YES NO

To participate in an audio-recorded interview discussion that will be transcribed for data analysis.

YES NO

To share work that he or she produces during this project, including visual arts (drawings, photography, paintings) and written projects.

YES NO

Name of parent/legal tutor

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be kept by the researcher.

APPENDIX V

ORAL SCRIPT FOR ASSENT FROM CHILDREN

Hello. My name is Heather Phipps. I am a university student at McGill. I am inviting your class to participate in my research study on Canadian multicultural picture books. I am interested in how you read and understand the pictures and words in stories. I would like to work with your teacher over the next 3-4 months. The research will help us to understand how we can teach and learn from stories in the classroom.

During this time, I will be participating in activities with your class. I will be bringing some stories to the classroom to share with the teacher and we will be planning some projects together. I hope that you will enjoy reading the stories with your teacher and working on projects together. We will all be learning from the stories and from each other.

While you are working on some class projects, I will sometimes have a small audio-recorder to record the activities. This is what my audio-recorder looks like (show recorder to the children). If your parents have given you permission to be audio-recorded, I will ask you if it is ok before recording. I will also invite you to participate in a conversation about the stories, in a small group. If you do not want to be recorded, you can let me know and I will not use the recorder. I will listen to the recordings and then write down the conversations on my computer. I will be the only person listening to the recordings, as well as my professor.

I will ask you if you would like to share some of your work for the research project, such as drawings, stories, or projects that you make.

This year, I will be writing a report for my university, and will also share this research with other teachers. However, I will not use your name or your teacher's or school name in my report.

If you have any questions, please do ask me at anytime. I will be happy to answer your questions.

APPENDIX VI

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROMPTS

FIRST INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about your teaching experience.
2. Do you recall your own experiences of reading and literacy as a child? What was your relationship with reading? What stories did you enjoy? What do you read now?
3. Describe your vision for creating a community in your classroom. How do you foster an environment where children care for and respect each other and themselves? Do you see a way for stories in contributing to this community?
4. Can you describe your approach to teaching language arts/literacy?
5. What role do stories play in your teaching?
6. What kinds of reading/writing/language activities do you plan for your class?
7. How do you engage children with stories, both artwork (visual) and written text?
8. How do you find that children connect with literature?
9. How do you encourage children to express themselves in response to stories (writing, drawing, etc.)?
10. What interests you about teaching with multicultural Canadian literature? Do you have questions you are interested in exploring with your class?

SECOND INTERVIEW

1. How do you find that the children responded to you reading the multicultural Canadian stories?
2. What was your experience of reading and teaching with these texts? What did you notice? Were there questions and issues that you found interesting?
3. How do you feel these stories contribute to the community in your classroom? Did children learn more about each other through the dialogue and shared reading experience?
4. How did the children respond to the illustrations in the picture books?
5. What are your impressions of the artwork in the books?
6. What projects/activities did your students enjoy working on in response to the stories? How did these projects extend their understanding of the texts? What ideas did they explore?
7. How did your students respond to the issues and themes presented in the stories? Are there themes that you would like to continue working on?
8. In what ways does the literature connect to the children's experiences?
9. How do you feel about teaching with multicultural literature in the context of Montréal? Would you like to further explore teaching with other texts?

APPENDIX VII

INTERVIEW/GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPTS WITH CHILDREN

1. How do you like listening to your teacher read stories?
2. Is there a book that you enjoyed reading with your class? What did you like about it?
3. Was there part of the story that you found interesting?
4. Can you describe, in your own words, what the story is about?
5. What do you think about the pictures in this book? What is the artist trying to tell us?
Is there a picture that you especially like in the book(s)? Would you like to show me that picture?
6. Tell me about the project/activities that you worked on after reading the story. What did you make? Can you show me?
7. How do you feel about working on these projects with the stories in your classroom?
8. Would you like to read more stories, with your teacher, friends, and on your own?