UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

THE BOOK DETECTIVES:
METAFICTIVE DEVICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF CRITICAL LITERACY
IN YEAR 3 STUDENTS

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

Children enter school with a wide variety of experiences and skills in relation to 'reading' in the broadest sense of the word (Thomson, 2002). These could range from simple book handling skills to fluency in reading texts. When children begin their formal education, they continue to develop their literacy skills through educational programs and pedagogical approaches that reflect current educational thinking and the needs and visions of teachers, schools, systems and the State. Many formal reading programs use a structured 'guided reading' approach, with levelled texts. These commercially produced texts are graded to suit students' level of attainment and claim to develop their decoding and comprehension skills (Turner, 2014). Although reading such texts can assist students to acquire age-appropriate word reading and comprehension skills (e.g. literal and inferential), this particular focus, coupled with the nature of levelled texts, limits students' opportunities to engage with quality literature and to develop critical literacy skills.

This study sought to prepare students to function in an information-rich, multimodal and uncertain world—a world in which they require scaffolded opportunities to read, analyse and critique a wide range of texts to make sense of the happenings around them. To be successful, students need critical literacy skills to negotiate their way as citizens in a complex world of written and visual texts, and to make informed decisions to understand the barrage of information that assails them on a daily basis. Therefore, the aim of this thesis was to support teachers and students to meet this goal. The study focused on participants' construction of knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to critical literacy. A small, bounded intrinsic case study design was used. This design was well-suited to research in a social setting and a constructivist view of the interactions of participants with each other, the texts and the teacher. These interactions enabled a clear understanding of the complex interrelationships at play (Stake, 1995).

The findings demonstrated that the students' engagement with picturebooks containing metafictive devices in a whole-class Readers' Circle pedagogical framework stimulated their engagement with the books. Their attitude to this genre changed, with students moving from literal responses to more thoughtful and insightful ones. Further, students moved from a state of passive acceptance, in which they were required to simply read the text, to one of anticipation and excitement,

which earned them the title of 'Year 3 Book Detectives'. Thus, this study demonstrated that picturebooks containing metafictive devices are able to teach students strategies not only to read literature, but also to think about it, as opposed to simply learning isolated skills.

Since we live in a multimodal world with ever-increasing societal and environmental challenges, the skill to interpret the visual and the written is imperative for students' future success. In such uncertain times, students need to be able to critically engage with multimodal texts, which allows them to understand that authors write with the intent to influence. When these skills mature, students can apply them to other modes of communication that constantly bombard our screens to decide what is real and what fits their personal view of life.

In addition, there are opportunities for improvement within higher education and teacher education. It is paramount to train pre-service teachers to fully realise the potential of quality literature, including picturebooks containing metafictive devices, to develop the critically literate voice of their students. In-service classroom teachers should also be offered the opportunity to implement programs within schools that offer a whole-school approach to develop students' critically literate voice. Tracking this development would offer opportunities for further research on the effect of using picturebooks in schooling.

Certification of Thesis

This thesis is entirely the work of Carmel Turner except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Stewart Riddle.

Associate Supervisor: Professor Georgina Barton

Student and supervisor signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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List of Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACE	Australian Curriculum English
CBCA	Children's Book Council of Australia
CBI	Children's Books Ireland
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NLG	New London Group
US	United States

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

. Early in their lives, children need to develop the ability to examine diverse texts including multimodal texts and take what is valuable in their eyes while discarding what does not fit their developing worldview (Crawford et al, 2019). To address this issue, this thesis examined the influence of picturebooks that contain metafictive devices on the development of critical literacy in Year 3 students in an Australian school. It demonstrated that within the classroom, children can—when offered quality literature and a scaffolded environment—advance their critical literacy skills by understanding how to view a multimodal text and discern the author's message which may offer multiple perspectives of a situation or theme

The development of a critical stance cannot be fostered by taking one view of reading or examining texts. Rather, students need experience with texts that explore different cultures and societal and world issues to understand the troubled times in which they live (Exley et al., 2014). Reading involves more than one system of communication and as stated by The New London group (1996) and further developed by Cope and Kalantzis (2000) the pedagogy of multiliteracies offers a view that the many modes of communication are manipulated by the reader to make sense of a text. Thus the complications and contradictions of our world, coupled with 'fake news', can bewilder children who are striving to make sense of their environments and seeking to develop their own values. By learning how to critically engage with texts that are appropriate for their stage of development, students can then transfer these skills to more secular texts, including advertising, which often targets young children, and the so-called news, which often presents a biased view of events. Janks (2018) posed the question: 'What then is our role as educators in a world where facts are only accepted if they serve the interests of power?' (p. 95).

As an experienced educator, I believe our role is to have a multifaceted view of education, especially in the attainment of literacy skills, by equipping our students with a critical eye when it comes to discerning the truth. The philosophical premise underpinning this thesis is that we need to reject the 'back to basics' rhetoric and seriously consider the future of our students in a world that is yet to present itself. The monomodal focus on standardised testing, in conjunction with the use of levelled texts designed for instruction, has resulted in a narrow view and experience of

reading that largely focuses on processing information in print (Unsworth & Chan, 2009). Therefore, this study's rationale is to give students a voice, preparing them to function in an information-rich multimodal world. For this to occur, students need scaffolded opportunities to read, analyse and critique a much wider range of texts if they are to discern the author's intent. Kress (2010) considered how we assess multimodality and learning gained from multimodal texts. There needs to be a relationship between curriculum and assessment and the positioning of the student in this testing structure (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). The effects of standardised testing can also cause restrictive practices among teachers, narrowing their understandings of student learning (Hardy, 2018).

Educators have the opportunity to equip students with a critically literate voice and the skills to confidently interpret their multimodal world by actively shaping their personal worldview. This thesis argues that the skill of being critically literate entails reading a text while being aware that the perspective conveyed in the text is solely the author's view and this skills is paramount in today's world. Janks (2019) stated that while it is easy to read a text that does not challenge our personal views, it is challenging to read one that does not fit with our worldview. Texts are never neutral; students need the skills to understand the author's stance and be able to read 'between the lines'. Even when the topic makes the reader uncomfortable, the reader should be able to filter the information that fits their personal schema (Janks, 2019). The teaching of this skill needs to begin early in school. Students need to be given the opportunity through literature—and in this case, picturebooks containing metafictive devices such as irony and intertextuality—to develop their critically literate voice.

This thesis demonstrated that when given the opportunity and skills, students are very capable of interrogating a text and then applying that critical stance to their personal worldview. A significant body of scholarly literature as reviewed in chapter two has pointed to the power of picturebooks in developing critical awareness of social issues. The literature has also indicated that teachers feel unprepared when faced with the task of educating children in areas of human crisis (Crawford et al., 2019). Semioticians argue that it is not just about these two modes of communication (words and pictures) but how images and language function as a 'bundle'. Quality picturebooks often deal with important societal and environmental issues that confront our students in an ever-changing, challenging and multimodal world (Janks,

2018). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) recognised that literacy involves not just the acquisition of the skills of reading, viewing and writing but now also includes the ability to engage with a multimodal and ever-changing world that is moving forward at a rapid pace.

1.2 Research Problem

Children enter school with a wide variety of experiences and skills in relation to 'reading' in the broadest sense of the word (Thomson, 2002). This could range from simple book handling skills to fluency in reading texts. When children begin their formal education, they continue to develop their literacy skills through educational programs and pedagogical approaches that reflect current educational thinking and the needs and visions of teachers, schools, systems and State. Many formal reading programs use a structured 'guided reading' approach, with levelled texts. These are commercially produced texts graded to suit the student's level of attainment and claim to support students in developing their decoding and comprehension skills (Turner, 2014). Although reading levelled instructional texts can develop students' age-appropriate word reading and comprehension skills (e.g. literal and inferential), this particular focus, coupled with the nature of levelled texts, constrains students' opportunities to engage with quality literature and so develop their evaluative or critical literacy skills. While this may not be a widespread practice, only engaging with these basal readers for classroom reading is insufficient if we are to equip students with the skills to decipher communication through multiple means (Serafini, 2014). Students need to be given the opportunity to respond to texts that offer varying degrees of complexity and multiple perspectives (Evans, 2009). In Australia, teachers are expected to address all aspects of the Australian Curriculum: English to develop skills in students that not only enable them to apply their basic code-breaking skills to be literate but also to apply their meaning-making, analytic and participatory skills to become critically literate. As stated in the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2019; *F-10 Curriculum/English/Rationale,* v8.2):

> The study of English is central to the learning and development of all young
> Australians. It helps create confident communicators, imaginative thinkers
> and informed citizens. It is through the study of English that individuals learn

to analyse, understand, communicate and build relationships with others and with the world around them.

Accordingly, teachers need to broaden students' exposure to texts and media, extending beyond levelled instructional texts to access rich, complex and authentic texts, both print and multimodal, across a wide range of genres, including quality literature. A strategy to develop the role of 'text analyst' (Freebody & Luke, 1990) is to expose students to the power of picturebooks, especially picturebooks containing metafictive devices. These types of texts not only strengthen readers' decoding skills but are also powerful means of shaping culturally aware, critical perspectives of students as thinkers. For example, Nodelman (2005) outlined this plurality in discussing the paradoxical nature of picturebooks. He observed that their illustrations draw readers into a set of codes and conventions that give the freedom to interpret a text, yet they also immerse readers in the cultural implications of these codes. If these skills are not attained, students are at risk of not fully developing their critically literate voice. Consequently, this thesis investigated potential ways to implement such an approach in our uncertain world.

1.3 Background to the Study

During my 30 years spent in primary classrooms, I became increasingly aware that many teachers held a narrow view of literacy, in which code-breaking (Freebody & Luke, 1990) was the dominant practice. Thus, it was apparent—even before the advent of state and later national testing—that many teachers approached the teaching of literacy from a basic skills level approach. Based on observations over the course of my career, the impetus for this study was to counter the belief that only the use of commercially produced levelled texts can be successful in developing students' literacy or that one genre of literature (such as a novel) should be the sole literature used in the classroom (in a pedagogical sense). Such a structured skills-focused approach may support children's development of letter–word recognition— often the target objective—however, when students gain a certain level of sight word recognition, there is a risk that their practice and perception of reading only focuses on these subskills alone. This becomes a dilemma because of the insufficiency of this family of subskills alone to reflect what reading can be in its broadest sense and acting therein as readers. Facer (2016) argued that we need to consider education that is situated in the present reflecting the modern world we live in, thereby exposing

children to a wide range of literature. This should include multimodal texts such as picturebooks containing metafictive devices that can provide students with varying views of society.

Although the primary use of instructional texts can at times play an important role in scaffolding students' acquisition of code-breaking literacy skills (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Stanovich, 2000), such texts can lead to the premature concretisation of a procedural schema of reading—or of any of the language arts—around code-breaking alone, or even about typologies of form as in overly-rigorous prescription of genre. The likelihood is that such prematurity will lead to a narrow conception of reading, its enabling skills and of self-efficacy as a reader. This is a shared concern. For example, Exley et al. (2014) argued that 'the robotic posturing of genre pedagogy is entrenched in Australian schools and since 2008 has featured in stimulus-response tasks of national literacy benchmarking tests throughout the years of schooling' (p. 60). Reinforcing the benefits of a wide range of literature rather than a sole diet of levelled basal readers, Fox (1993), an accomplished author, commented: '[b]asal readers are emotional deserts between two covers… How pathetic to write any book in order to teach the mechanics of reading. Real books offer the mechanics of reading as well as the emotional and intellectual mechanics of life itself' (p. 121). With a balanced view of literature within the classroom, which includes picturebooks for all age groups, children have the opportunity fully realise their ability to read, view and interpret a text.

A benefit of quality literature relates to making meaning of texts. Evans (2009) stated that students do not obtain meaning from merely reading, but that the complexity of meaning can be explored through shared oral responses that offer differing perspectives to a text. Offering a wide range of literature can be reflected in opportunities afforded to students to read resourcefully and to play and develop in a variety of roles. These could include critical or analytic literacy, which pervade all text genres, be they written or visual (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Unsworth et al. (2019) pointed out that globally, educators have articulated the need for students to be exposed to multimodal texts if they are to live in and interpret our multimodal world. Picturebooks offer an opportunity to develop these skills in students and that development is the focus of this study.

A potential way to address this development is by considering diverse multimodal texts, a strategy that has gained increasing attention over the past 20

years. A crucial shift in literacy education and research was established by the New London Group (NLG; 1996). They noted that educators need to equip students with skills necessary to participate fully in every aspect of society. In the past, the teaching of literacy was often restricted to 'formalised, monolingual, monocultural and rule governed forms of language' (NLG, 1996, p. 61). As noted, this form of instruction alone is neither accommodating of students' fundamental skill and awareness-building for active and contributory social participation, nor sufficient for dynamic personal understanding and growth in their expanding worlds. However, given that attention to building critical literacy skills beyond such fundamentals is essential to young people's sustainable development, what are the elements needed to support this development?

At the current stage of my career working with pre-service teachers, I have become conscious of the fact that students have very limited knowledge of the corpus of children's literature and little experience with picturebooks containing metafictive devices. As a result, I decided to carry out a pilot study with young people in schools. I was interested in gauging the students' responses to the metafictive devices in picturebooks and how these devices influence their ability to critically engage with a text. It became increasingly apparent during this pilot study that children became empowered to critically express ideas related to these texts when alerted to specific literacy tools within the narratives (Dresang, 2008; Turner, 2014). Another result of this pilot study was the fact that the teachers became interested and adopted a more critical approach when discussing texts with their students. Stimulus methods included using an object in the classroom (an old shoe) and asking open-ended questions about that object, for example, who was the owner of the shoe? Moreover, in the school where the pilot was conducted, the use of picturebooks in middle and upper primary was not a common practice. Therefore, this thesis built upon these observations by extending the original pilot study to a whole-class focus. The thesis also explored a more explicit development of pedagogical practices, such as the use of metalanguage to express understandings of messages embedded within picturebooks containing metafictive devices.

1.4 Research Aims

This study aimed to understand how multimodal literary texts (quality children's picturebooks) affect the reader as they engage with the metafictive devices

and use the associated metalanguage to express this understanding. This study explored the impact of the inherent devices of these books—as identified by Sipe and McGuire (2008)—on students' critical literacy abilities; that is, their abilities to perceive and critique the messages in these multimodal texts and develop their own understandings and beliefs about the world in which they live. While many studies have investigated the impact of children's literature on the development of critical literacy, this study offers a more detailed description and micro view of the impact of metafictive devices on students' critical literacy. It investigated the effect of identifying and naming metafictive devices within picturebooks on the development of students' critically literate voice. Given the troubling times that citizens of today's world are facing, students need to develop an interrogative stance when reading and responding to a text and an awareness of the context in relation to their world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). These authors have contended that literacy is not just the attainment of individual skills but rather, it is making meaning in a cultural context and having the skills to hear the author's voice and accept or reject their ideology. To facilitate this exploration, a Readers' Circle pedagogic approach was used to give voice to the Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1990) as discussed in section 1.6.5. A Readers' Circle is an interactive group activity in which students are supported to read and discuss a literary text. This type of activity allows teachers to challenge students to discard the passive acceptance of the content of a text and to instead adopt a more critical stance to understanding the author's purpose (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

For students to be prepared to function in an information-rich multimodal and uncertain world, they need scaffolded opportunities to read, analyse and critique a wide range of texts to make sense of happenings around them. To be successful, students need to develop the skill of critical literacy, which will equip them with the ability to not only negotiate their way as citizens in a complex world of written and visual texts but also to make informed decisions as they come to understand the many texts that bombard them as readers of their world. It is important to note here that the multimodal world does not contain only simple images and matching text but also highly sophisticated texts that break the boundaries of simple literary conventions and carry meaning in multidimensional ways. Hence, this thesis aimed to understand how best to support teachers and students in achieving this goal.

1.5 Research Questions

This study was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the metafictive devices in carefully selected award-winning children's picturebooks?

2. To what extent do picturebooks and their metafictive devices influence young children's critically literate voice?

3. What pedagogical approaches support children's development of a metalanguage to express their critically literate voice?

4. Does the expression of a metalanguage related to picturebooks with metafictive devices empower children's critically literate voice?

The evolution and refinement of these questions were the result of

- considerable reading of academic literature, which is referred to in this thesis;
- the plethora of exceptional high-quality literature that is being published;
- the need for students to have a personal agency when expressing their views, which includes the development of a metalanguage; and
- the increasing complexity and uncertainty of the world and the proliferation of 'fake news' and biased reporting.

Students need to be equipped with a critically literate voice and the skills and metalanguage necessary to develop this skill. The writings of S. Riddle and Apple (2019) strongly resonated with the motives behind this research: that we need to oppose the political realities that are influencing what a good education should be. Therefore, we need to reject the constraints being placed on education through a performance-based view of reality and equip students to examine the world critically and constructively. Paradoxically, authors—including authors of children's literature—are producing high-quality thought-provoking literature that challenges and moves the reader into an uncomfortable and often questioning frame of mind. Included in this literature is the ever-increasing selection of picturebooks containing metafictive devices that inform, challenge and entertain.

1.6 Research Significance

It is imperative that young people be supported to become confident critical readers. This study was designed to examine the ways in which the inherent metafictive devices in picturebooks trigger a response in students, demonstrating that they are reading the text at a critically literate level; that is, that they are reading

beyond the literal level and are aware of the devices used by the author to position the reader to receive the intended message. Luke (2013) stated that critical literacy entails not only examining the cultural and other worldviews but also understanding how texts work. A critical reader can decide who in the text is advantaged and who is compromised or ignored. Students need to relate to the literature that they are reading, and picturebooks can offer a student agency in expressing their views (Vasquez et al., 2019), which is a focus of this study. Previous studies, such as that of Sipe and McGuire (2008), have examined these devices. Similarly, Pantaleo (2014) has worked in classrooms using picturebooks containing metafictive devices. However, as stated, that study took a more micro view of the development of a critically literate voice, the influence of metafictive devices coupled with metalanguage to express understanding.

The findings of the present study should provide important information for teachers and researchers on how teachers can develop their students' abilities to be critically literate. This could be achieved by selecting pertinent literary texts (not just commercially produced basal readers), especially those texts that allow students to begin developing their personal view of their changing world while engaging with metafictive devices. This information is intended to assist teachers in adjusting teaching and learning activities and offering students developmentally suitable literature without compromising student preference, personal taste. Critical literacy, when developed from an early age, gives students agency with which to express their views of their world and the wider community, an ability that is even more imperative during troubled times (Vasquez, 2017). Janks (2019) stated that the author is in a powerful position to arrange content such as words and images to position the reader to accept their message. A critical reader can discern the tools used by the author and develop their own position in relation to the message being conveyed. The reader also needs understand that the use of devices in texts can oppose their view of a just society and therefore, such positioning can be rejected (Janks, 2019). This more micro view of being critically literate is in no way intended to diminish the pleasure of engaging with picturebooks with all their idiosyncrasies, whimsy and challenge but rather, to embellish their status in literature as excellent pedagogical tools in the eyes of educators.

1.6.1 Children's Literature

Children's literature has a rich history, originally rooted in a pedagogic approach. This is because books for children were viewed as the perfect way to teach children lessons about life (Nikolajeva, 1996). Today, children's literature continues to be viewed as a resource to teach about 'aesthetic, social, cultural and intellectual aspects of human experience' (Paatsch et al., 2019, p. 62), which is significant as students navigate a troubled and evolving world. To place picturebooks in context of a long history of children's literature, a view of the past is examined. The earliest reference to children's reading was in the Classical Era (7th century BC), where children read adult books or modified versions. The practice of modifying adult literature for children dates to Homer's *Iliad*, which was produced on wooden tablets in a simplified version for children. In 1300, a collection of Roman tales was modified to be read by children. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the printing press enabled many versions of the earlier tales to be published. Gutenberg and Caxton were responsible for the first printing press, which revolutionised book production (1476) and the accessibility of books for all, including children. *Aesop's Fables* was translated from French in 1476 and are still published today. Children were reading this style of book and mainly school texts. The late 17th century brought the Puritans to the fore. *A Token for Children* was an example of tales about exemplary lives and deaths of children. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was promoted and led to titles such as *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott.

The 17th and 18th centuries saw the emergence of a very important genre— folk and fairy tales. Charles Perrault's tales, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, endure to this day (Stevenson, 2011). John Newby (1713) was acknowledged as the first printer of children's literature. The moral tale continued into the 19th century. The Brothers Grimm were leaders in this genre. *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865) was a hallmark text because it did not contain a moral! *Seven Little Australians* (Turner, 1894) heralded a new era of realism and a new view of childhood.

This background places in context the next evolution in children's literature, which in the 20th century, saw the rise of postmodern picturebooks. Such picturebooks, which contain metafictive devices, are part of that era and continue to evolve today (Stevenson, 2011). Metafictive devices are the tools that the author uses to tell the narrative. Sipe and Pantaleo (2008) summarised these as follows:

1. the 'blurring' of boundaries in literary texts, particularly in relation to the relationship between author, narrator and reader;

2. subversion, or the change in status between the story and 'real' outside world; the traditions of traditional stories may be mocked or destabilised;

3. intertextuality, or the layering of many different texts within the one text;

4. multiplicity of meanings within the story and the open-ended nature of the narrative;

5. playfulness, where the use of semiotics draws the reader into a complex world of symbolism; and

6. self-referentiality, where the reader is unable to view the text from 'outside' the story but develops a relationship within the text. (p. 3)

Picturebooks containing metafictive devices are characterised by the interdependence of words and pictures; they are multimodal texts. They were selected for this study because they contain metafictive devices that, when coupled with the appropriate use of metalanguage, empowered students to express an understanding of the author's intent. The messages in these texts are not always obvious, particularly without the knowledge that authors often give clues in the illustrations as to the message behind the story (Serafini, 2014). The literary devices in these texts set them apart from illustrated storybooks. While appearing outwardly innocuous to some or frustratingly unfinished to others, children's picturebooks are highly sophisticated works of multimodal literature that, at their best, contain literary devices that manoeuvre a reader into a position to accept or question the messages proposed by their authors and illustrators (Serafini, 2014). These texts invite a reader to be intimately involved in the story; for example, by offering the reader opportunities for co-authorship through the presentation of multiple storylines—a feature that Goldstone (2004) described as a powerful position for the reader. These picturebooks are now recognised as more than useful pedagogical tools or childhood entertainment (Gamble, 2013; Lillard, 2013; Sipe, 2008). Rather, they are unique combinations of literature and visual art, worthy of serious attention (Sipe, 2008). Picturebooks also offer an opportunity to raise awareness of social and political issues in an appropriate format and offer students the opportunity to develop their own critical stance in relation to their emerging beliefs about their world (Facer, 2019). Patterson (2019) stated that political socialisation is a process where beliefs and attitudes are formed and that picturebooks are an important source for

developing dialogue with children about political and social issues, which is of great importance today. These texts were the vehicle for this study because they offer the opportunity to develop a critical stance—the capacity to read between the lines and interrogate a text while being aware of the inferences posed by the author (Kelly & Moses, 2018).

Picturebooks are one vital portal into the world of complex understanding and articulation of knowledge and beliefs about our world. Under the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum, critical and creative thinking are highlighted as a vital perspective. It is clearly stated that 'students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems' (ACARA, 2015, p. 14). In fact, personal and social capabilities, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding, which are also 'General Capabilities' in the curriculum, are all areas that could be explored by engaging with picturebooks. An example of such a picturebook is *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000), which has extensive social commentary about the loss of individuality in our cities and provides a basis for students to take a critical position; for example, by making comparisons between society-as-depicted and society-as-experienced. Discussion of a text in such a way uses the skill of comparing and contrasting as a basis for coming to a position. Consideration of the people, power, language, issues and judgements involved brings this comparison to a critical position. This also creates an instructional platform for developing this skill if it does not exist—and for furthering it if it does. While picturebooks are appealing to children, they also contain powerful social and political messages that act as a springboard for further class discussion (Patterson, 2019). Additionally, it calls into play, and possibly into further development, the metalanguage involved in instruction and in students' communication, associated with this procedural way of knowing and coming-to-know (NLG, 1996).

Unsworth and Macken-Horarik (2015) claimed that students need to develop a meta-perspective where they read texts and apply their knowledge of metaphor and other literary devices to obtain the higher level of meaning that these texts embody. As discussed by Bartlett (2010) and the NLG (1996), any such critical practice positions an individual to develop differing viewpoints and understandings of contexts. For example, the experience of being critically literate with *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2006) will have bearing on what is done intertextually with conceptualisations

of society as explored in *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005), with their differing perspectives of the wider world and their application to different contexts. This perspective is important for the current study because it offers students the opportunity to begin to make sense of a world with many challenges.

1.6.2 Influence of National Testing

The introduction of accountability in education—initially driven by the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, during the 1980s—led other countries, such as the United States (US), Canada, Australia and European countries, to adopt a system of standardised testing. This focus was intended to reform education in the area of accountability and to understand the impact that teachers have in this area (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). Volante et al. (2008) examined the practice in Canada, which had adopted a model that accounted for differences in provincial and state results. However, problems arose in this large-scale assessment of student learning even though it had the potential to provide data on student progress and offer schools the opportunity to plan for further improvement. The problems arose when students' results were made accessible to public scrutiny, which developed a culture in teachers of tailoring their teaching to focus on the impending testing regime. Moreover, these tests did not give students the opportunity to engage in a creative or critical manner; this was because the responses that are 'correct' are often closed and do not encourage an oppositional or interpretative stance.

The need to offer a more critical view of what it is to be literate to support the claims of this thesis was highlighted by Kearns (2016) who studied standardised high stakes testing on youths in Ontario. The study found that discrimination occurred when groups of students were categorised as either literate or illiterate, and those found lacking in literacy skills were to be remedied. This led to feelings of alienation and low self-esteem among the students and the remedies suggested were not helpful. Labelling students into categories was not beneficial because many of the skills involved in being literate were not identified by these testing regimes, especially in students who were multilingual (Kearns, 2016). Therefore, the present study focused on equipping students with a critically literate voice and the ability to decode multimodal texts, which will broaden their repertoire of critical literacy capabilities. This is particularly necessary in Australia, with its current focus on standardised testing, academic achievement and accountability, evidenced in ongoing professional

and community concern for students' results in national testing (e.g. National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]). Therefore, teachers are understandably focused on those aspects of the curriculum that are being assessed (ACARA, 2015; Unsworth et al, 2009). There is discord between the national curriculum (ACARA, 2015), which includes the expectation that students should develop skills in reading and understanding multimodal texts, and the singular view of what literacy is that NAPLAN takes of this mode of communication (Unsworth, Cope & Chan, 2019).

1.6.3 Contextualising the Study

Curricula across the world acknowledge the need to address the terms of UNESCO (2020), which has stated that every child has the right to a high-calibre education and articulate the view of what being literate and critically literate entails. In Australia, engaging with literature in schools is an important component of the national curriculum. The Australian Curriculum: English consists of three strands—Language, Literature and Literacy. The Literature strand emphasises the importance of providing students with opportunities to experience, understand, appreciate, respond to, analyse and create literature across the school years. One of the aims of the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2016d) is to 'ensure that students: learn to listen to, read, view, speak write, create and reflect on increasingly complex sophisticated spoken, written and multimodal texts . The rationale also states that the English curriculum 'helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature to expand the scope of their experience' (ACARA, 2016c). Accordingly, continued use of levelled instructional texts without ensuring sufficient access to literature, including multimodal texts, does not fulfil the brief of the Australian Curriculum to ensure that students have opportunities to be critically literate.

1.6.4 Critical Literacy

At the heart of this thesis is the premise that opportunities need to be afforded to students to develop a critically literate voice. The importance of this skill is not to be underestimated as we prepare these students for a new world. Although there is no one widely accepted definition of 'critical literacy', the term generally implies developing readers' abilities to 'read' with the knowledge that words and their interrelations can be used to create different contexts, viewpoints and positions. From these, readers deconstruct and/or construct thoughts, ideas and images that are part of a text, of themselves and of an interaction between the two (Janks, 2014). A

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definition of critical literacy is often contested, which creates challenges. Thus, to propose one definition of this skill of being literate and all that that it entails, would be stylised and mono-focused. However, the outcome of much research and discussion gives rise to many frames of reference for a critically literate approach. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) stated that in critical literacy, the focus is not on the mechanical skills of reading, but rather to understand the world and people's values and actions in society. Students must develop the ability to view societal and world issues from many perspectives before they can express a considered view of their own. It is also important for readers to develop the ability to apply knowledge, not only to make meaning of texts but also to understand that an author will have a particular point of view (Freebody & Luke, 1990). These skills are essential to understanding one's standpoint as a reader, that is, how the reader is positioned within a text. Thus, an essential element in what it is to be critically literate is the ability to understand the deeper meanings embedded within a text. This important set of skills lies at the heart of this research.

However, it is prudent to acknowledge that these skills are a description rather than explanation of how critical literacy works. Others are not so sure that the term and its underlying processes are amenable to a more exact definition. For example, Comber (2001) claimed that 'critical literacy resists any simplistic or generic definitions because its agenda is to examine the relationships between language practices, power relations and identities– and this analysis involves grappling with specific local issues' (p. 271). Comber (2001) continued that teachers and students' involvement in developing critical literacy skills includes coping with difficult questions that relate to people, power, language and issues in our society, including disadvantage. A further issue in defining critical literacy is that of 'judgement' and of the form and meaning we gain from engaging with texts and their messages. As Lankshear (1997) noted, '[d]eveloping critical readers and writers of texts has, then, necessarily to do in part with enabling them to detect and handle the inherently ideological dimension of literacy and the role of literacy in enactments and productions of power' (p. 46).

Callow (2017) argued that there needs to be further investigation of what it means to be critically literate—at not only a local level but also globally and digitally. He continued that a nursery rhyme from any culture can be examined and critiqued. Being critically literate develops in students the skill of choice, whereby

they adopt a stance in relation to a text. This can then lead to more sophisticated discussion of social issues concerned with bias, culture and themes around the environment. As Luke (2012) stated, this can be viewed as 'naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities' (p. 9).

The philosophy underpinning this thesis is supported by the writings of the NLG (1996), which form a component of the conceptual framework of this study, along with the critical stance taken by Luke and Freebody (1990). The NLG referred to 'situated practice' that incorporates discourses from students' worlds outside school into school-based contexts of learning. For teachers, this means that they frame pedagogy around inviting, helping and reinforcing students' own capacities and action in framing emerging pictures of realities. Both teacher and students experiment with remembered links from past experience to help construct awareness, value and belief structure for possible meanings in presenting material and select a method to achieve this goal. For example, using a comparison framework for reconciling text content and one's own knowledge in a general area allows for both to be transformed, and even for a serendipitous space to be constructed between them. This reconciliation is a powerful driver of the critical process, bringing together not only the attributions of something problematic about similarities and differences in given points of the comparison, but also of options for a resolution, of causal links to choices, of consideration about who benefits and of where 'best choices' are for now and later.

1.6.5 Four Resources Model

The Four Resources Model proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990) is a valuable model for developing a balanced literacy program outlining the essential skills needed when engaging with texts and for understanding the development of critical literacy. The model describes the repertoire of practices that a reader needs to be literate, namely, coding practices, text-meaning practices, pragmatic practices and critical practices. The first resource, coding practices, focuses on the coding-breaking skills that students need to acquire to decode unknown words (e.g. syllabication and phonics). It also involves learning about the conventions and patterns of print and how to combine these new skills to develop their ability to make meaning from texts. The second resource, text-meaning practices, involves students developing the ability to understand how ideas are represented in a text and what meanings and cultural practices are present within a text. In the third resource, pragmatic practices, students

develop their ability to understand the uses of texts, including what to do with a text, how a text is shaped and how the uses of a text shape its composition.

These three resources—coding, text-meaning and pragmatic practices—can be addressed in school-based literacy programs that use a structured 'guided reading' approach with levelled texts. However, such programs cannot easily address the fourth resource, or indeed offer richness in content to the development of all practices. Critical practices or indeed all four practices can be developed using literature that offers students a rich experience that is only present in quality literature and not evident in levelled instructional texts. This thesis argues strongly that quality literature such as picturebooks with metafictive devices offers a dynamic, challenging and engaging form of reading more suited to developing that critically literate voice and positioning students to take their place in the world.

For students to learn the essential skills of text analyst and critic and be an active text participant, they need to work with a wide range of authentic texts, including multimodal texts and literature. In learning to read complex literary texts, students' abilities to understand the deeper meanings embedded within texts can be fostered. In so doing, students are also creating understandings of their place in society and shaping their own points of view or perspectives on society.

Since developing the Four Resources Model in 1990, Freebody and Luke have continued with their work, especially in relation to the fourth resource of critical practices. In particular, they have emphasised the importance of the social practices that readers engage in when making meaning of text (Luke & Freebody, 1997; 1999) as well as readers' ability to analyse and critique texts knowing that all texts have as their basis an author's intentions, biases and perhaps even ideologies (Luke et al., 2011). Luke et al. (2011) argued that to generate sustainable gains in students' literacy engagement, participation and achievement, students need 'sustained engagement with substantive knowledge' (p. 8) and scaffolded opportunities to engage critically with literacies related to their lives and worlds, both inside and outside of school. Therefore, the present study aims to build agency in students, which will empower them to adopt a more active and critical stance in reading as text critics and text participants. The Four Resources Model is at the core of this thesis because classroom practices in response to national testing can favour an approach of code-breaking and simple reader–response questions.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the focus of this study as well as the literature and methods that were used. It also situated picturebooks containing metafictive devices within the corpus of children's literature. Further, the chapter stressed the value of giving students the opportunity in a troubled world to engage with quality literature and shape a personal philosophy on what is important in their world and what they, as individuals, can contribute to make it a more equitable place for all (Facer, 2019). It is imperative that the skills associated with becoming literate that feature in the Australian Curriculum (n.d.) be developed in students. However, as stated by Exley et al (2014) the practice of relying on graded, commercially produced texts persists, which does not develop in students the ability to interrogate texts. This is because these instructional texts offer limited opportunities to explore, challenge and synthesise meaning and its application to society and the students' personally evolving schema of their world and their place in contributing to society's evolution. Educators must develop the ability to engage students, which will in turn develop in them the ability to 'learn to ask not only what someone is saying, but how someone has constructed text including a visual image' (Eisner, 2004, p. 5).

It is recognised that an issue that could arise is the 'letting go' of secure practices and engaging in risk-taking through engagement with and knowledge about picturebooks, their inherent devices and their role in developing critical literacy. However, the benefits of this critical engagement with texts far outweigh any trepidation that teachers may feel towards this view of what being critically literate means. Educators must engage in the discourse of threshold concepts and leave the 'safe portal' (Land, 2012), embarking on the messy business of creating new knowledge—first for themselves and ultimately for their students. The stage of liminality as discussed by Land (2012) offers a new way for educators to consider their practice. I am cognisant of the position in which educators are placed and the external pressures of education today. However, the view of Kiley and Wisker (2009) is that once educators go through a transformative experience, it is irreversible, thus leading to educational change in the field.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in six chapters. This introductory chapter has outlined the aims, research questions, impetus and background to the study as well as the

significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature that has informed, influenced and supported my view of the value of picturebooks containing metafictive devices and their role in education to develop critical literacy. Chapter 3 describes the methodology that shaped the interactions with the students in a Year 3 classroom. Chapter 4 analyses the picturebooks and their metafictive devices. It is interspersed with excerpts from my journal, demonstrating the power of these devices to develop a critically literate voice. The journal entries also validate the assertion that the metafictive devices in picturebooks, coupled with the use of the associated metalanguage, foster an understanding of humankind that supports students to form their own views of our dynamic and complex world. Chapter 5 further explores the features of picturebooks containing metafictive devices and adds to the findings from the perspective of the 'Year 3 Book Detectives' (as Year 3 came to be known) and their teacher. Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the previous two chapters, responds to the research questions and outlines the implications for future practice, encapsulated in a model of the changes evident in the Year 3 Book Detectives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature pertinent to this study and links it to the research questions. As referred to in Chapter 1, this study demonstrates how literature—in this case picturebooks containing metafictive devices—can lead students from a passive and literal acceptance of narrative to a position of agency to engage at a critically literate level and acquire a critically literate voice. As our world faces ever-increasing challenges relating to the environment, governance and social issues, students need to develop the capacity to read and be able to distinguish between truth and inaccurate or biased material. Janks (2019) importantly stated that in troubling times such as these, 'I think critical literacy is needed in all political times. We always need tools to look at the way texts are working to position us to control the way we think. In other words, we always need critical literacy' (p. 319).

The overall theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study are illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks
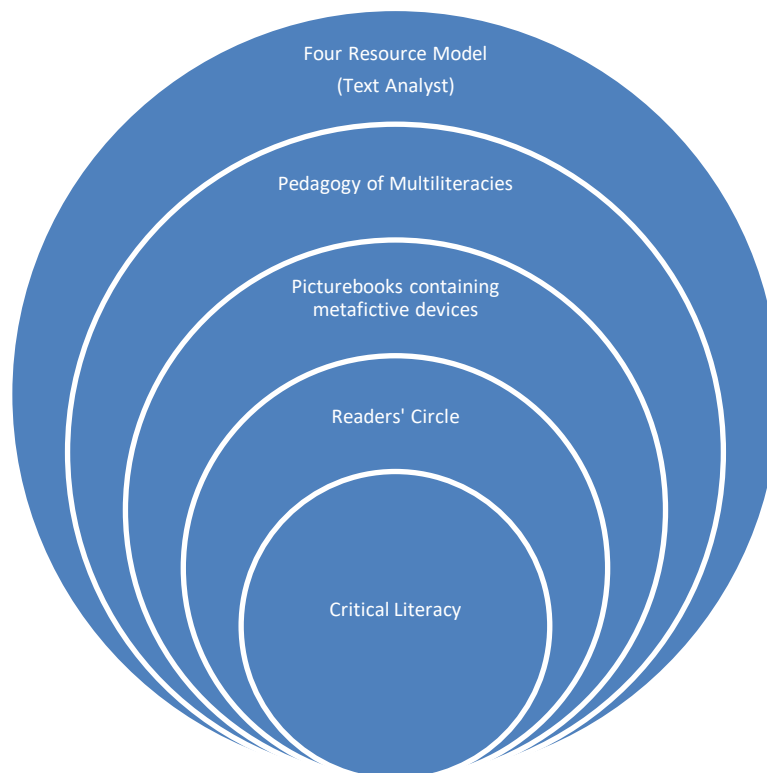
The outer layers of the five concentric circles depict the overall context (learning environment or classroom) which is viewed through the theoretical lens of social constructivism. Within the next two layers lie the conceptual frameworks. The fifth layer of the framework represents the Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1990), which provided an important foundation for the Australian Curriculum English (ACARA, 2016b). For the purposes of this study, the Text Analyst quadrant of Freebody and Luke's Four Resources Model is a focus supporting the goal of the study (critical literacy), which lies at the heart of the framework. The fourth layer, the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (NLG, 1996), can be directly linked to the Text Analyst practice because the pedagogy emphasises the importance of critical engagement with multimodal texts in developing readers' critical literacy abilities. In the third layer of the model lies the vehicle of the study (picturebooks containing metafictive devices) while in the second layer, the pedagogical process of the Reader's Circle is shown. Finally, at the core of the framework lies critical literacy in uncertain times, the goal of the study.

The framework guided this study as nationally and internationally, educators recognise the pressures applied to teachers to conform to a top-down view of education. According to this view, the public ranking of schools can drive the interpretation of curriculum to a basic 'read and respond' exercise that does not embrace the philosophy of developing a critically literate voice in students and empowering them with a sharpened focus on texts and issues in their world (Curwen et al., 2019). Teachers need the skills and confidence in their own practice to deal with the politics in their workplace, especially in a time of social upheaval (Vasquez et al., 2019).

In Australia, the English curriculum has three strands of Language, Literacy and Literature. Across these three strands, there is a particular focus on spoken and multimodal texts. ACARA (n.d.) also focuses strongly on the appreciation and understanding of literature, well beyond just superficial contact with texts. It emphasises an appreciation of the variety of literary texts, the significance of these texts in everyday life, the analysis of texts and the exploration of the relationships between different genres. These expectations begin in the Foundation year (the first year of formal schooling) and develop progressively across the year levels or grades.

In recognising the significance of these skills in developing the capabilities of young Australians, it is critical to consider the strategies that will be developed in the

classroom to achieve all that is required to be a student with competency in English. The challenge for teachers then, is to address all aspects of the national curriculum and in so doing, to assist students to acquire the skills that not only allow them to apply their basic code-breaking skills to be literate but also to apply their meaning-making, analytic and participatory skills so that they can become critically literate. Accordingly, teachers need to deepen students' access to text beyond the literal level of basic instructional texts to include rich, complex and authentic texts, both print and multimodal, across a wide range of genres, including literature (Luke, 2014). This was the driving force behind this research, namely, to empower teachers by demonstrating the successful practice that emerged in this study. Working with Year 3 students, the study explored the metafictive devices in picturebooks, with students applying their knowledge of the metalanguage of this literature to their understanding of the message a text carries. However, some teachers working under the national testing regime may feel compelled to prepare students for these tests and not fully engage in literature as opposed to commercially produced levelled texts that appear to offer some false sense of security. Ironically, the richness of literary texts prepares the students at a much deeper level of understanding as their skills and world perspectives are heightened (Vasquez et al., 2019).

In the Australian Curriculum, students in Year 3 are expected to attain the skills listed in Table 2.1. The excerpt below also states clearly that it is expected that students will read and comprehend above a basic literal level to become competent in analysing texts, drawing inferences, identifying an author's point of view as well as their own and critically evaluating the meaning they construed from the text. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), such competencies are critical if students are to fully engage with increasingly complex multimodal texts and the semiotic language embedded in these texts.

The Australian Curriculum includes the following 'General Capabilities in Literacy' to inform teachers of the skills, and the application of these skills, that students need to attain during their schooling:

In the Australian Curriculum, students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society. Literacy involves students listening to, reading,

viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts. Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school. Success in any learning area depends on being able to use the significant, identifiable and distinctive literacy that is important for learning and representative of the content of that learning area. Becoming literate is not simply about knowledge and skills. Certain behaviours and dispositions assist students to become effective learners who are confident and motivated to use their literacy skills broadly. Many of these behaviours and dispositions are also identified and supported in other general capabilities. They include students managing their own learning to be self-sufficient; working harmoniously with others; being open to ideas, opinions and texts from and about diverse cultures; returning to tasks to improve and enhance their work; and being prepared to question the meanings and assumptions in texts (ACARA, 2016)

Table 2.1

Examples of Content Descriptions and Their Elaborations Across the Three Strands of the English Curriculum – Year 3 (ACARA n.d)

Strand	Content	Description	Curriculum component
Language	Language variation and change	Understand that languages have different written and visual communication systems, different oral traditions and different ways of constructing meaning.	ACELA 1475
	Expressing and developing ideas	Identify the effect on audiences of techniques; for example, shot size, vertical camera angle and layout in picturebooks, advertisements and film segments.	ACELA 1483
Literature	Literature in context	Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways and speculate on the author's reasons.	ACELA 1594
	Responding to literature	Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts and share responses with others.	ACELA1596
	Examining literature	Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the readers reaction, including rhythm and onomatopoeia in poetry and prose.	ACELT 1600
Literacy	Literacy texts in context	Identify the point of view in a text and suggest alternative points of view.	ACELY1695
	Interpreting, analysing and evaluating	Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning and begin to evaluate texts by drawing on a growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features.	ACELY1680

Note: ACELA = Language; ACELT = Literature; ACELY = Literacy.

The abovementioned skills, such as identifying a point of view, mirror important life skills that students need to develop. Therefore, teachers need to provide students the opportunity to engage in picturebooks containing metafictive devices because these multimodal texts offer a richness of expression and artistic

merit. These texts also contain context that reflects a rapidly changing and uncertain world at an appropriate level for students to begin forming their own socio-cultural view of the world. This capacity was demonstrated during this study as students began to engage with the metafictive devices and explore the meanings of these texts at a higher level. Critical literacy is a world-wide focus. An example of this is the work of Janks (2010), who has written widely about the importance of critical literacy, including a focus on apartheid in South Africa. In Canada, Vasquez's (2017) work with young children has focused on social justice, using among other texts, children's literature. Canada has also chosen to endorse the development of a critical perspective as have other countries, including Hong Kong, through the work of Lo et al (2012). For these capabilities to be fully realised, students need to acquire a critical stance to their skills in reading and interpreting texts and cultivate a critically literate voice to express their evolving knowledge about personal, family and societal issues. The students need new perspectives in the way they interact with and interpret multimodal texts (Vasquez et al., 2019).

2.2 Power of Story

The vehicle for reaching critical literacy in this study was engagement with picturebooks containing metafictive devices. In this section, these texts are defined, their essential characteristics are considered and studies that have examined the impact of multimodal texts on readers' understanding are discussed. Sipe (2008) alerted us to the notion that through story we learn about other peoples, cultures and beliefs; this is vital for students as they begin to form their own worldviews as young citizens. Likewise, Moebius (1986) pointed out the importance of story in the emergence of a worldview, formed by reading different perspectives and ways of knowing. The power of story unfolded during this thesis as not just entertainment but a powerful vehicle that can inform and challenge as well as enrich a student's literacy development and indeed, how they view texts in relation to their world.

2.2.1 What are Picturebooks Containing Metafictive Devices?

Picturebooks containing metafictive devices are characterised by the interdependence of word and picture; in other words, they are multimodal texts. The literary devices within these texts set them apart from other picturebooks or illustrated storybooks. In these texts, the author has the tools to communicate their particular message to the reader (Bull & Anstey, 2019). Picturebooks invite a reader

to be intimately involved in the story; for example, by offering the reader opportunities for co-authorship through the presentation of multiple storylines—a feature that Goldstone (2004) described as a powerful position for the reader. These texts described by Goldstone (2004) evolved during the latter half of the 20th century, during which there were 'fundamental changes in attitudes, styles and academic disciplines' (p. 197). The five principal concepts of this era in relation to literature allowed this study to use a genre to develop students' critical voice. This is because the complexities and scope of such texts offer students the opportunity to explore, critique and then apply these skills to their evolving view of their world. These concepts are as follows (Goldstone, 2004):

1. the fragmentation of the components of the text, including missing elements and the change from one subplot to another;

2. an unusual degree of playfulness, with unexpected interruptions and additional information;

3. a degree of irony and contradiction;

4. a more horizontal power structure and the ability of the reader to co-author; and

5. the involvement of the reader in the actual process of storytelling.

Writing during this time, artist and essayist Berger (1972) described another important defining characteristic of picturebooks containing metafictive devices, that is, the 'gap' between words and pictures filled by the reader engaging with the text. The authors and illustrators of these texts intentionally used the 'gap' to offer information in pictures that is different from the words used in the text—another reason for the choice of these texts for this study. The words can be complementary to the images, but they may also be contradictory. This counterpoint creates a tension in the text. The use of counterpoint in picturebooks is stimulating because it elicits different responses in students (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006).

Defining characteristics of picturebooks containing metafictive devices have also been catalogued by Sipe and McGuire (2008), who elaborated six inherent devices:

1. The 'blurring' of the boundaries in literary texts, particularly in relation to the relationship between author, narrator and reader; contemporary culture changes the status between previous hierarchies. This aspect could also include the juxtaposition of words where a traditional idea is supplanted with

a modern twist. Because these picturebooks invite the reader to co-author and participate in the text, there is a blurring of the traditional role of reader and author. The reader is no longer passive.

2. Subversion, or the change in status between the story and 'real' outside world. The traditions of traditional stories may be mocked or destabilised as characters from a traditional story could suddenly act out of character or break the traditional frames between scenes of the story.

3. Intertextuality, or the layering of many different texts within the one text; Barthes (1977) stated that no texts are original but are composed from 'bits' of many texts. This is a deliberate device used in picturebooks containing metafictive devices to create a pastiche of text, images and ultimately, meaning. This may include references to other texts or the insertion of art works.

4. Multiplicity of meanings within the story and the open-ended conclusions that differ from the 'happily ever after' endings present in the majority of children's literature; the same story could be told from many different perspectives but be set in the same place and time.

5. Playfulness, where the use of semiotics engages the reader into a complex world of symbolism; these texts do not take themselves seriously and are semiotic and visual carnivals. The font style, shape and size will vary within the one text; it will be placed in varying directions on the page and flow onto subsequent pages.

6. Self-referentiality, where the reader is unable to view the text from 'outside' the story but develops a relationship within the text; the assumption that the reader will become 'lost in the book' is cast aside. The physical structure of the actual book and the layout can challenge the reader; at times, there are holes and jagged pages and these elements becomes part of the story. The reader is left to ponder the construction of the story and the book it houses.

These writings were a powerful influence in the conceptualisation of this study because they provided a strong framework to introduce quality picturebooks and their meanings to Year 3 students in the classroom. The crystallisation, that is, the explicit defining of these devices and the metalanguage expressed by these authors, also gave me the insights into how to present these texts to students and the possibilities to elicit with a critically literate voice because of the complexities these

texts contain. The six metafictive devices, as described by Sipe and McGuire (2008), illuminate the sophistication of children's picturebooks containing such devices and offer opportunities to become critically literate by negotiating this minefield of devices and entering into the advanced process of interpretation. The reader must not only read the text but also read the pictures. The power of intertextuality, for example, can influence students and gives clues as to the author's intent, when it is pointed out to students that the author has changed a painting or introduced a character from another story, which influences the original story in which it is embedded. Thus, they are able to focus on this device and its role in the telling of the story. These visual cues within the texts give students a clear signpost to unfolding events within the story.

In a traditional picturebook, the author and illustrator have authority over the text and its interpretation (Goldstone, 2004). In picturebooks containing metafictive devices, there are additional features that add to the complexity of the text, thus requiring the reader to become involved in the artistic creation of the book. The reader is made aware of devices and elements of the book and may even be addressed directly by the narrator or a character within the story. The reader is not shielded from the world but is made aware of the structures and context of the story. Characters in these texts can move from one plane to the next and indeed, move from story to story within the same text. In writing about the postmodern era, Benjamin (2010) discussed the appropriation that picturebooks have at their core; that is, taking recognisable elements from the established traditions of storytelling in the past and juxtaposing them in unfamiliar ways to convey a new message or another view of the world.

Another scholar who has extended the work of Sipe and McGuire (2008) by analysing the metafictive nature of picturebooks in a more fine-grained manner is Pantaleo (2014). Pantaleo (2014) has described 18 inherent metafictive devices that give educators even more guidance in providing students with rich opportunities to engage with and critically analyse texts by elaborating on the original six devices. This gave me even greater scope and ideas on how to engage the students in recognising these devices used by authors in this study. Indeed, the picturebooks that contain all the devices that were examined by Pantaleo (2014) were chosen for this study. These devices are summarised in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Metafictive Devices Identified by Pantaleo (2014, pp. 324–332)

No.	Metafictive device
1	Narrator(s) who directly address readers (either in words or gestures); narrator(s) who directly address character(s)
2	Character(s) who directly address the narrator; character(s) who directly address readers (either in words or gestures)
3	Characters who comment about their own stories or other stories
4	Situations in which a narrator becomes one of the characters
5	Multiple narrators or characters telling stories
6	Multiple narratives/stories
7	Stories within stories
8	Disruptions of time and space relationships in narratives/stories
9	Narratives/stories that do not have a chronological or linear structure—narrative discontinuities (breaks or interruptions in the telling of the story)
10	Intertextuality (the relationship between texts, especially literary ones, a blend of texts within a text)
11	Parody (to exaggerate the style of an author)
12	Typographic experimentation (arrangement, style or appearance of matter printed from type)
13	Mixing of genres, language styles and speech styles and ways of telling stories
14	A pastiche of illustrative styles
15	Mise-en-abyme (an image that is embedded within another image as its miniature replica)
16	Something about the design or layout of the book that is new or unusual
17	Something that makes readers aware of the processes/methods that are being used to create/make up the story
18	Indeterminacy (not exactly known or defined)

To conclude, picturebooks are a valuable vehicle for critical literacy pedagogy because they offer an intriguing portal into the complexity of knowledge and beliefs that constitute our world. This study aimed to dispel the myth that picturebooks are only for small children; instead, they should be viewed as dynamic and powerful literature. Picturebooks also provide rich opportunities for readers to develop their own understandings and to articulate those understandings. The importance of such opportunities has been reiterated in both the Australian Curriculum: English and the 'General Capabilities', in which critical and creative thinking are described as vital components of teaching and learning (ACARA, n.d.). The Australian Curriculum: English has specifically stated that 'students need to engage with multimodal texts in order to explore meanings, make informed decisions and communicate their understandings about the messages in these texts' (ACARA, n.d.). Within the General Capabilities, personal and social capabilities, ethical

understanding and intercultural understanding are emphasised. This study demonstrates how picturebooks containing metafictive devices can provide rich opportunities for the development of such capabilities.

2.2.2 Research on Using Picturebooks Containing Metafictive Devices

Anstey and Bull (2000) advocated the use of picturebooks in fostering critical literacy skills, stating that readers need to develop the ability to interrogate a book, which is an aim of this study. They also noted that the inherent devices within these texts offer readers new and exciting ways to engage with these texts. The following studies provide initial support for pursuing this line of research.

In the first study, Pantaleo (2003) engaged with 23 Year 1 students on a weekly basis by reading aloud and discussing a selection of picturebooks to develop their critical literacy abilities. In particular, the sessions focused on the device of intertextuality; that is, the connections students make when reading texts. Three specific types of connections were examined, namely, (1) intratextual (text-within-text), (2) intertextual (text-to-other-text) and (3) autobiographical (text-to-life), in which students made connections between a text and their own lives. The students' responses were at a higher level than expected for their age and equal in-depth across the three categories of connections (Pantaleo, 2003).

Pantaleo (2003) also categorised the students' oral responses to the read-aloud/book discussion sessions as

1.   hermeneutic (interpreting and making generalisations)
2.   aesthetic (to enter the book)
3.   agential (to co-author the book)
4.   personal (to tell about themselves)
5.   heuristic (to extend understanding)
6.   informative (to tell others information)
7.   communal (to make a common understanding).

The findings indicated that following scaffolded experiences with picturebooks, these young primary students could move beyond the boundaries of simple exchanges and literal interpretations of texts to develop a richer, more critical stance when discussing their experiences of reading. This was an aim of the current study and is particularly important in times that challenge all citizens to critically interpret the messages being conveyed by the media.

In another study, Pantaleo (2009) investigated how picturebooks containing metafictive devices allow students to understand that there are multiple ways to interpret a text, which is essential in understanding the complexities of communications in today's times of conflicting reporting to society. Focusing on a stimulus text such as *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (Child, 2002), Pantaleo worked with 78 primary students (aged 8 to 10) in weekly sessions in which the characteristics of these texts, including devices, were discussed. The students were also asked to write their own print texts in which they could incorporate the characteristics and devices that they had learned about in the sessions. Data analyses revealed that the students used the vocabulary of the sessions (i.e. metalanguage) to express their understandings of the metafictive devices and that of the 12 devices discussed, the students most frequently responded to the following devices:

1. Intertextuality
2. Pastiche of illustrative styles
3. Parody
4. Unusual page layout
5. Typographic experimentation
6. Mise-en-abyme.

In this study, the richness of the picturebooks containing metafictive devices afforded a depth of discussion to support students' identification of devices and the metalanguage to express their understandings. It was concluded in Pantaleo's study that the weekly explorations of complex picturebooks provided a platform that enriched students' oral exchanges and supported them in moving from literal to critically literate responses and interpretations. These texts often offer information and perspectives about contemporary and contentious issues that are impacting a world in flux. Thus, these texts offer a vehicle for shared discussion and personal view-making about issues that face our world, ranging from the micro view of family to the macro view of society.

In a study conducted with primarily socio-educationally disadvantaged minority students in Year 8, Leland, Ociepka and Kuonen (2012) examined how specific focus on interpretive stance, as defined by Lewison et al. (2008, as cited in Leland et al., 2012), can support young adolescents in developing their critical reading abilities. After engaging with selected picturebooks and novels, students

were able to use appropriate metalanguage and convey newly developed critical perspectives in their oral and written responses.

Arizpe and Styles (2003) examined students' responses to visual texts. In their study, 84 students (aged 4 to 11) from seven primary schools in London and Essex read selected picturebooks containing metafictive devices with their teacher and classmates. Each reading was followed by an interview and another reading of the text. Arizpe and Styles (2003) noted that the students missed many elements of the text in their first reading but new insights were gained when the students re-read and discussed the book with their classmates. The findings indicated that the students needed guidance in learning to read pictures. The researchers also discovered that although the students found the high-level probing questions challenging at times, they enjoyed the subsequent discussions (Readers' Circle). Over the duration of the study, the students' enthusiasm for these texts increased and they freely immersed themselves in reading the picturebooks. The present study views the texts as multimodal texts with the interdependence of both modes (words and pictures) of communication.

2.3 Pedagogical Approaches for Using Picturebooks in the Classroom

2.3.1 Four Resources Model

Critical literacy is clearly seen in the work of Freebody and Luke (1990), who proposed the Four Resources Model. This model offers a valuable heuristic for understanding the repertoire of practices that a reader needs to be literate. These include coding practices, text-meaning practices, pragmatic practices and critical practices. It is the final quadrant of critical practices (which refers to the reader becoming a text analyst) that influenced the focus of this study. Since 1990, Freebody and Luke continued their work, particularly focusing on this fourth resource of critical practices. They also emphasised the importance of the social practices that readers engage in when making meaning of text as well as their abilities to analyse and critique texts knowing that all texts reflect an author's and illustrator's intentions (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Further, these scholars emphasised that the power ratio between the author and the reader is firmly tipped towards the author, whose intention is to influence the reader. This is an important influence on this study, which aims to inform students that the author is a powerful figure when

engaging with a text. In a further extrapolation of their model, Luke and Freebody (1999) noted that literacy education does not merely involve skills development. Rather, literacy education involves the shaping of cultural practices, developing students' capabilities and supporting them to manage texts in all their forms across varying contexts. In other words, literacy education reflects the literate society we wish to create.

The role of the teacher in this pedagogical approach is vital. Reading is not a fixed activity but is a dynamic manifestation of the constantly changing relationship between the reader and the text (Walsh, 2006). No matter how valuable the resources used by teachers it is the influence of the teacher and their ability to develop a classroom climate that fosters risk taking and debate (Luke, 2000) which empowers students to develop a critical approach and socially construct a view of what texts do and how they can influence their daily lives. Freire (1995) viewed the classroom as a place where a culture of critique and creation of texts offers students a place to develop their identity as a member of society.

In their work on the Four Resources Model in the 1990s, Freebody and Luke focused primarily on written text. It was not until the next decade that they expanded their model to include multimodal texts. During the intervening period, other scholars and researchers, most notably the NLG (which included Luke), expanded the understanding of literacy and literacy teaching to multiliteracies. These were broadened to include communication via digital texts, digital technologies, sound and music as well as still and moving images. This was an important shift, given that today more than ever, the focus on multimodal texts is imperative as students are faced with constantly increasing, multi-pronged views of the world in a multimodal format. These texts—in this case, picturebooks containing metafictive devices—offer great possibilities as an adjunct to effective teaching (Crawford et al, 2019). The crises that face the 21st century student are often embedded in these texts, such as stories about war and environmental issues or, in a less confronting and more familiar scenario, a family view of life. These texts offer students the opportunity to read the message embedded in the words and pictures and develop their own ethical stance about the importance of family and its place in this world (Crawford et al 2019).

2.3.2 Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

The NLG (1996) was a group of 10 scholars who met in New London, Hampshire, in the US in 1994 to discuss the state of literacy pedagogy. In response to the rapid changes occurring in society at large at that time—increasing local linguistic and cultural diversity along with rapidly increasing global connectedness and new modes of communication—the group sought to expand understandings of literacy and literacy teaching. The group noted that the place and power of multimodal texts and their role, not only in education but also in understanding an increasingly complex world, needed to be acknowledged. In their seminal paper, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures*, the NLG (1996) challenged educators to view the future in relation to the 'what' and 'how' of literacy pedagogy, a perspective that can be lost in responding to today's regime of national standardised testing.

In focusing on the 'what' of literacy pedagogy—'What is it that students need to learn?' (NLG, 1996, p. 73)—teachers are viewed as 'designers' of the learning process and environment. The group noted that teachers, educators and researchers needed to be involved in the study of different content and classroom practices that would motivate and achieve different learning. The 'what' in NLG's framework cleverly offers a wide view and range of pedagogical practices, also encompassing the theory of discourse, which offers a range of applications regarding NLG's view of social situations and their constant evolution of the social sphere.

The NLG's design framework is viewed through three different lenses: Available Designs, Designs and the Redesigned. The 'what' of Available Designs are the resources of semiotic systems and discourse. Different discourses are viewed, including the discourse of schools and societal conventions. In Design, the 'what' of designing texts and interactions is not dependent on the past and instead shapes new interactions and discourses as people draw upon the systems of their society. Design endeavours to transform, depending on the social situations where the designing occurs. In focusing on Design, the NLG recognised the process involved in shaping meaning. The 'what' of the Redesigned are the products that result from designing, such as a metalanguage. As previously stated, the use of metalanguage was an empowering agent for the students in this study. Students and teachers need this metalanguage to articulate the Redesigned, which was an important skill to be

developed in this study. This new 'what' (metalanguage) is needed to describe texts, images and meaning-making interactions.

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies Project sought to equip teachers and students with such a language. This language was essential for discussions involving the 'what' of multimodal texts and critical analysis of semiotic systems found in multimodal texts, be they written or digital. This metalanguage, according to NLG (1996), needs to be a flexible 'tool kit' to empower teachers and students in giving voice to their interactions and critical understanding of multimodal texts. This application of the 'what' is reflected in the ACE in the expectations that students will not only become literate, but critically literate, in expressing their understanding of a multimodal world.

In focusing on the 'how' of literacy pedagogy—'the range of appropriate learning relationships' (NLG, 1996, p. 73)—the group sought to establish how the nature of teaching and learning should be understood when teachers are viewed as designers of the learning environment. The group argued that literacy pedagogy needed to involve a complex integration of four important factors: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing and Transformed Practice. The 'how' of Situated Practice refers to the practices within a community and acknowledges the contributions that people (both experts and novices) make to society. In schools, this relates to the students' experiences in and out of an educational setting. The 'how' in Overt Instruction is systematic and in the case of multiliteracies, involves teaching a metalanguage to empower students to express an understanding of different modes of meaning. The 'how' in Critical Framing is a development of the student's knowledge that emerged in the Situated Practice phase. This phase nurtures students' ability to critically evaluate previous learnings and move to a different context in relation to systems of knowledge and the society in which they live. The 'how' in this phase empowers students to move from a 'safe place' of learning and develop the skills of critical literacy as they apply to learning to be literate and learning to be an active participant in society. The final view of the 'how' is Transformed Practice where the students can apply their critical literacy skills (among other skills) to other contexts and experiences. This important project was indeed a forecast of future practice in education and curriculum development. This transformed practice was noted by the classroom teacher of the students involved in this study and her comments reflect a transformed group of students in attitude and skills.

The landmark framework, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (NLG, 1996), is a seminal work that has influenced the way we view the development of literacy skills. The construct of multiliteracies has taken our hitherto mono-focused view of literacy pedagogy and expanded it account for the complex multidimensional society in which students live and learn. The multiliteracies framework has given students and educators a more critical view of becoming literate and the metalanguage to design and develop their pedagogies. Rather than have literacy skills imposed upon the learner, this framework empowers teachers and students to engage in the multiliteracies that reflect society's evolving forms of communication. This framework is critical today as we grapple with the uncertainties and challenges of a complex world, a world that at times offers students a biased view of what is truth and what is acceptable in a supportive cohesive and nurturing society. As argued by S.Riddle and Apple (2019), political influence in constructing today's curriculum is tainting the core values that a just and equitable society should strive for. These values, which are central to civilisation, are being replaced with perceived measures of the academic performance of students.

2.4 Critical Literacy

2.4.1 Conceptualising and Defining Critical Literacy

The term 'critical literacy' generally implies developing readers' ability to read with the understanding that: (1) words and their interrelations can be used to offer different contexts, viewpoints and positions from which readers can deconstruct and/or construct thoughts and ideas and (2) images can also stand alone, be part of a text or require an interaction between image and text (Janks, 2014). However, this general definition does not capture the complexity of this important multidimensional construct. A review of the evolution of the term and its use by key scholars and researchers (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Janks, 2014; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Lankshear, 2001; Freebody & Luke, 1990; NLG, 1996) revealed important variations that teachers and their students need to understand if becoming critically literate is to be attained. Today more than ever students need the skills to understand and navigate a complex, troubled and evolving world and to express their own worldview with a critically literate voice (Vasquez et al., 2019). This evolution is discussed in the following sections, beginning with the Four Resources Model

(Freebody & Luke, 1990), which informed the development of the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, n.d.) and underpins this study.

As noted, the goal of this study was to focus on primary students' development of critical literacy. The review of the literature revealed a number of studies that have explored students' critical literacy capabilities in a range of ways and that have informed this study. The study of Exley et al. (2014), which is also discussed in relation to the process of Readers' Circle, was conducted with a highly diverse preparatory class in a socially and educationally disadvantaged community. Using three approaches to engage with traditional fairy tales, (1) exploring generic structure and identity, (2) developing critical awareness of language through process drama and (3) engaging in Readers' Circle discussions, the students demonstrated that even very young children from a challenging environment could develop an understanding of metalanguage and their critical literacy capabilities.

A study by Peterson and Chamberlain (2015), which was conducted with 17 older primary students (aged 10 to 12), examined how interactive read-alouds (books that can be read as a group) with a selection of multimodal texts focusing on social issues could develop students' critical literacy skills. The findings indicated that these students, nine of whom were learning English as an additional language, could connect personally with the texts as well as identifying the structures and stereotypical representations. Taken together, the findings of these studies indicated that both young and older primary school students (including those learning English as an additional language) responded to active approaches to reading and discussing multimodal texts to the extent that they are able to demonstrate critical literacy abilities, including the appropriate use of metalanguage and an understanding of the structure and stance of the texts.

Today more than ever, students need the skills to interrogate and make decisions about the author's intent and build their own ethical stance when it comes to issues that will affect their immediate environment and will also be a global imperative for their future as well as that of their peers. Students need to be given the opportunity, through quality multimodal literature and in this case, picturebooks containing metafictive devices, to take an objective stance and express their position through a critically literate voice. As Janks (2019) pointed out, the skill of being critically literate is applicable to all times, allowing students to interpret their current

situation where 'fake news' can infiltrate certain modes of communication (Turner & Griffin, 2019).

2.4.2 Importance of Critical Literacy in Uncertain Times

While the overall aim of this study was to examine how primary students' engagement with and responses to picturebooks containing metafictive devices can lead them beyond a narrow view of reading, the immediate goal was the development of critical literacy skills. As a consequence, it was important to examine how this complex construct is understood by educators, scholars and researchers so that an informed operational definition could be proposed for this study. The study amplifies the need for students to develop this critical lens through which they can view and interpret a changing world in uncertain times. Many students and their families are experiencing feelings of uncertainty, especially with the relentless recycling of catastrophic news through every form of media, and students need to be able to establish their own beliefs and not be influenced by this plethora of views (Crawford et al., 2019). Many authors view children's literature as a reflection or portal into the world. In today's uncertain times, these texts offer students an opportunity to be able to read and form personal views. Although such texts reflect an author's perspective, they also offer that gap between words and pictures, allowing the reader to form their own sense of the world (Crawford et al 2019).

Educators today face the challenge of equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate uncertain times (Facer, 2019). However even in troubled times, continues Facer, there is opportunity for reinvention and creativity and to experience storytelling in a way that presents students with a new worldview. Stories are told in a variety of ways in our multimodal world and picturebooks allow educators to explore different modes of communication. Many young people are already challenging world leaders, voicing the younger generation's concerns for the future. However, these students need to be equipped with the ability to critically read materials and therefore make sound judgements that may lead to societal change (Janks, 2020).

2.4.3 Other Perspectives on Critical Literacy

In addition to Freebody and Luke (1990) and their emphasis on multiliteracy, a number of scholars and researchers from the original NLG (1996) went on to extend their ideas about multiliteracies, critical literacy and literacy pedagogy. These include Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Kalantzis and Cope (2012). The work of

these scholars is considered next, before turning to other scholars such as Lankshear (1997) and Janks (2014), whose work also informs current approaches to critical literacy pedagogy and was an influence in this study.

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is important to consider in relation to critical literacy (and to picturebooks) because these authors moved the discourse from pedagogy dominated by language (especially written language or text) to also consider the importance of visual imagery. This was valuable knowledge that influenced this study since it legitimised the importance of illustrations in picturebooks, which can act as a conduit of a particular metafictive device. Indeed, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) offered a visual grammar, noting that 'like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction' (p. 2). This means that students need to develop the ability to read the visual. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) stated that children are exposed to an ever-increasing range of images outside the school environment and that the ever-increasing complexity of these images and text in media, newspapers and websites demands a sophisticated ability to decode and make critical decisions about their worth and validity. Such engagement with texts will become more and more necessary as children have increasing access to social media news about world events and need to develop an informed view of the world that is their own, not a media-influenced version of the truth.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) noted that schools are producing students who are visually illiterate. In giving precedence to written literacy, schools are short-changing students, who are missing out on learning an important literacy skill—that of utilising and interpreting visual images. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argued that if our society continues to develop multiple means of representing information, then students need to be given the opportunity and skills to interpret these multimodal texts. Indeed, the ACE explicitly refers to the interpretation of images in varying texts.

Two other scholars who participated in the work of the NLG (1996) and who have continued to inform critical literacy pedagogy, especially in relation to multiliteracies, are Cope and Kalantzis. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) noted that a pedagogy of multiliteracies focuses on modes that are broader than language alone. They stressed that current texts are not merely words but rather multimodal texts that include pictures as well as maps video visual and spatial patterns. With the increase

in global connectedness, pedagogy—now and in the future—needs to be flexible, open-ended and include the skills of reading and interpreting multimodal texts, whether they be in the form of television news, a website, a magazine or a picturebook. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) stated that in addressing these challenges, 'literacy educators and students must see themselves as active participants in social change' (p. 7). Indeed, students need to assume the roles of creator and designer, becoming proficient not only with the linguistic semiotic system but also with the visual, gestural, spatial and aural semiotic systems as they progress through their schooling (Bull & Anstey, 2007). This was an important consideration in this study, that is, to enable students to change their reading practices to read not only the words but to interrogate the peritext, images and page layout.

Kalantzis and Cope (2012) also contributed to current thinking about literacy pedagogy by comparing traditional (didactic) and critical approaches to literacy pedagogy. They noted that by focusing on real issues in society, critical literacies provide opportunities for personal and social transformation, thus preparing students to be active citizens, which is critical in today's world. In contrast, the approach of didactic literacies is passive, and can result in compliant attitudes and a tendency to follow established rules. Critical literacy empowers students to fully engage in their education by developing a depth of thinking and being. It is imperative then, that the ACE be implemented in all areas; not just the mechanical skills of literacy development but the whole gamut of skills, especially those of being critically literate.

A scholar who also wrote extensively about the political power of literacy is Lankshear. Lankshear (1997) noted that '[d]eveloping critical readers and writers of texts has, then, necessarily to do in part with enabling them to detect and handle the inherently ideological dimension of literacy and the role of literacy in enactments and productions of power' (p. 46). Lankshear (1997) also wrote about the importance of building students' sense of adaptive certainty and an empathic sense of certainty; that there is significance in being aware of the permeability of one's and others' perceptions of realities, of truth and of one's agency in these matters. These are all very good reasons for believing that critical literacy should be an essential component of any effective literacy program, a belief that has also influenced the core premise of this study.

Finally, the work of Janks (2014, 2018, 2019, 2020) is important to consider in relation to critical literacy pedagogy because of the need for students to develop a repertoire of understandings, including that of positioning. The author of a text 'positions' the reader to receive embedded messages, be they conveyed overtly or covertly. In doing so, the author is enticing the reader into their version of reality. In other words, a text is a specific version of the world and language with other signs and symbols (e.g. visual or spatial semiotics), which draw the reader into the author's version of reality. At times, different modes of texts can offer contradictory information. Janks (2014) made an important distinction between oral and written texts. In speaking, we do not always have the time to carefully select words and therefore rely on having a message understood. However, when writing, the craft of selecting words (and images) to convey meaning is more circumspect and a larger range of modes and semiotic systems is available. Indeed, in this study, the author was introduced to the students as someone who can manipulate a text to convey a desired message. This new understanding about the motives of an author endows the author with an identity that students may not have considered before. The author needs to be more than a name on a book cover but viewed as a creator of messages and ideas.

Janks (2010) also considered the practice of resistance to a text by stating that 'it is more difficult to read against a text that we are comfortable with' (p. 72). She also asserted if we are offended by a text, our own stance or beliefs give us the ability to dismiss the writing. Therefore, students need to develop this ability to accept or dismiss texts, especially a multimodal text that endeavours to persuade the reader through the visual and written mode. Janks (2010) argued that we need strategies to resist a text, that is, we need to develop the skill of 'resistant reading'. Texts prime us to receive the author's point of view. This is not necessarily a negative or sinister ploy. Nonetheless, texts can 'have designs on us' (Janks, 2010, p. 98) and what readers need is the ability to recognise that they are being positioned and to critically analyse the stance of the author. Indeed, these abilities are specified in the ACARA (n.d.; e.g. the Year 3 content description, 'Identify the point of view in a text and suggest alternative points of view' ACELY1675).

Critical literacy pedagogy does not focus on the mechanical skills of reading. Teaching and learning in relation to critical literacy goes well beyond 'the robotic posturing of genre pedagogy (that) is entrenched in Australian schools' and the

'stimulus-response tasks of national literacy benchmarking tests' (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 60). Critical literacy empowers students to raise questions and develop a social conscience and a point of view (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). Critical literacy helps students to understand and indeed question the construction of the society to which they belong. A critically literate person is in a position to become aware of the balance of power in our society, whether this be at a local level (home or school) or at a global level. Informed by these writings, the present study enacts this important skill of becoming a critically literate voice.

More recently, Janks (2019) asserted that the skills of becoming literate and critically literate are about how we use the practices of literacy in a social and literary way to make meaning and give power to the critically literate voice of our students. Critical literacy also gives students a sense of being empowered and to recognise when they are disempowered—an important consideration if they are to develop a social conscience and recognise the imbalance of power in our world in relation to access to even the most basic natural resources. Because of the increasing diversity in classrooms around the world, educators need frameworks that reflect this shifting agenda. Critical literacy can offer this framework to foster in our students the ability to participate and create a more just world for all—not just to live but to thrive (Vasquez, 2017)

2.4.4 Strategies for Developing a Critically Literate Voice and a Sense of Personal Agency in Children

Given that the work of literacy teachers, particularly those focused on developing their students' critical literacy capabilities, is not about enhancing skill development per se, the means for assessing whether students are engaging in the process of critical literacy and developing their capabilities is necessarily complex. As noted by Luke (2000), the work of literacy teachers is principally about building access to literate practices and discourse resources and about creating the enabling pedagogic conditions for students to use their existing and new discourse resources for social exchange in the fields where text and discourse matter. These, according to Luke (2000), 'constitute the social semiotic tool kit that one puts to work in educational, occupations and civic life' (p. 2).

As a result, the means for assessing students' growth and use of their critical literacy capabilities needs to be flexible, dynamic, adaptive, context-specific and capable of capturing students thinking as they engage in critically analysing texts in

the social context of their classroom (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). One widely used approach for gaining insight into students' critical literacy abilities in a social context is a dialogic form of literacy pedagogy derived from the Reader–Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 2004)—otherwise known as Readers' Circle. With this pedagogical model also comes a sense of agency where students find a sense of their own voice and realise how their opinion can contribute to the development of knowledge and ideas (Comber & Nixon, 2014).

It is important when reading a text to understand who is included or excluded from the narrative (Janks, 2019). This can be achieved by engaging with high-quality literature such as picturebooks containing metafictive devices that, in many cases, tackle societal issues using the power of narrative. Picturebooks offer a starting place for students to acquire the skills required to interpret other forms of multimodal texts from a political or other worldly perspective. Students need to develop this critical stance in relation to today's rapidly evolving political and climatic events. The ability to acquire a critical voice needs to begin at a very young age; especially as we need to not only safeguard our democratic systems but also shape children as the emerging generation of young people (S. Riddle & Apple, 2019). This also encompasses the need for equity in education, which continues to be subject to standardised testing, school comparison and ranking, practices that do not reflect a democratic approach to education (S. Riddle & Apple, 2019). Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) stressed the importance of developing a personal identity and self-confidence in students that will define how they interact in society. They also asserted that student agency, which should be authentic, is evident when students have a voice that is heard. This view resonated with this study, which aimed to equip students with the skills to navigate a world of differing values and perspectives.

2.4.5 Readers' Circle

Reader–Response Theory has informed literacy pedagogies in classrooms for several decades. However, more recently recognition has been given to the need for more critical and culturally responsive versions of this pedagogy, applied to a wider range of texts, including multimodal texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Janks, 2010, 2014; Park, 2012). This is particularly true internationally and in Australia where implementation of the ACE has emphasised the role of literature in developing learners' literacy capabilities (Simpson, 2014). Readers' Circle is a flexible, dynamic dialogic methodology that supports critical and communal practice in reading,

analysing and discussing literature and multimodal texts. Readers' Circle also offers valuable opportunities for authentic classroom-based assessment of students' language and literacy development (Simpson, 2014). A review of recent studies indicated that this approach to teaching has been successfully used to develop students' critical literacy capabilities across a wide range of ages and abilities for a range of purposes. In this review, only studies focused on the nexus of critical literacy and Readers' Circle were considered.

A whole-class Readers' Circle configuration was used in this study. From early years to upper primary level, two studies were identified that support the capacity of young children to engage with Readers' Circles and thereby develop their critical literacy capabilities. The first study was conducted in a low socio- economic Australian school with a diverse population of young children (Exley et al., 2013). The findings demonstrated that even in a challenging educational context, children as young as 4 or 5 years could engage with texts (fairy tales) in a range of ways (e.g. discussions and process drama) that developed their critical literacy capabilities and understanding of metalanguage. The second study, conducted in South Korea (also with 5-year-old children) engaged the students in weekly two- to three-hour read-aloud sessions that were followed by discussions and individual writing sessions (Kim, 2016). The findings indicated that these young children were able to pose questions, share opinions and develop critical perspectives on issues related to racial and cultural diversity. Taken together, these findings suggest that young children are indeed capable of developing critical literacy capabilities through their engagement with texts and their participation in Readers' Circle activities.

At the upper primary and middle-school level, two recent studies have also indicated that older students are capable of developing critical literacy capabilities through Readers' Circle activities. The first study (Park, 2012) was conducted over one year in an after-school book club with a diverse group of 23 middle-school girls. The girls attended one-hour Readers' Circle sessions twice a week to discuss student-selected literary texts. Park's (2012) findings indicated that that the students came to 'rethink their taken-for-granted ways of reading and sense-making' (p. 209) and that they were 'challenged, supported and even transformed by the interpretations, perspectives and life experiences of others' (p. 209). Such studies are critical because they affirm the pedagogical practice to develop a critically literate voice, which is the aim of this study.

Another study, conducted by Falter Thomas (2014) with middle-school students, indicated that online Readers' Circles facilitated by college students had a positive impact on the students' comprehension and their ability to discuss selected literary texts at deep, critical level. The online process of the Readers' Circle also increased their motivation to read for pleasure.

Taken together, the findings of these studies suggest that whether engaged with in the classroom or online, Readers' Circle activities have a positive impact on upper primary and middle-school students' abilities to engage deeply with multimodal texts and develop their critical literacy capabilities.

2.5 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter explored the construct of critical literacy, revealing that although the term is generally understood, scholars and researchers have conceptualised and examined the construct from varying perspectives. Nonetheless, the development of critical literacy capabilities is of paramount importance at a time when literacy is no longer constrained to the linguistic system. As delineated in the Australian Curriculum: English, students need to develop their critical skills across the multiliteracies with which they engage, both at school and beyond.

Second, the discussion of Readers' Circle clearly demonstrated the agency afforded to students when they are given the opportunity to express their understanding of a text and embellish their articulations by interacting with their peers. By listening to the responses of others, students develop a critical stance whereby the text is not just accepted in a passive manner but questioned (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Students also have the opportunity to see the text from a different perspective and take on the role of text critic (Luke & Freebody, 1999). This powerful pedagogic practice was an effective approach in this study.

Third, the ability to use and understand semiotics and construct meaning from multimodal texts has been the focus of considerable research, expanding our vision of what it means to be fully literate in a multimodal world and how the necessary capabilities can be developed and applied within the classroom (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Pantaleo & Sipe, 2008; Sipe, 1998). Developing the skills of critical literacy gives students the skills to not only read the text but also understand how the author is attempting to position the reader. With this understanding students can resist the

manipulation of the text (Freire, 1970). With literature as an important element in the ACE, picturebooks containing metafictive devices represent a body of writing that is suitable for students of all ages. These books also lend themselves to Readers' Circle, particularly in the development of critical literacy skills.

The nature and use of picturebooks containing metafictive devices to develop students' critical literacy skills were reviewed in this chapter. The findings suggest that this form of literature, with its unpredictability, unexpected qualities and metafictive elements, provides a powerful vehicle for moving students out of their 'comfortable practice of reading' (Barthes, 1975, p. 14). These characteristics also informed their selection for this study. The findings indicate that these texts help students move from passive reading and low-level literal interpretations to becoming active, engaged readers, participating with the author by making high-level inferences and connections. These texts also offer students a chance to develop their own worldview since they are often based on contemporary events that are either directly affecting students' lives or are highlighted in the media. With news spreading quickly today and many students having mobile phones, they need the skills to critically evaluate what they are reading (Comber & Grant, 2018). Students need to develop a sense of agency and empowerment, rather than being a victim of hopelessness when faced with a barrage of news that may or may not be accurate. By starting with young children using picturebooks containing metafictive devices, this study demonstrates how engagement with these texts not only develops critical literacy but also demonstrates the autonomy of these students as they acquire a sense of personal agency.

Fourth, to ensure that students are prepared to function in an information-rich but often misleading multimodal world, students need scaffolded opportunities to read, analyse and critique a much wider range of texts. To be successful, students need to develop the skill of critical literacy, which will equip them not only to negotiate their way as citizens of a complex world of written and visual texts but also to make informed decisions as they come to understand the many texts that bombard them as readers of their world. It is important to note here that the visual world not only contains simple images and matching text but also highly sophisticated texts that break the boundaries of simple literary conventions and carry meaning in multidimensional ways.

ACARA (n.d.) specifies a range of elements to support students' development across three strands of Language, Literature and Literacy. The Literature strand emphasises opportunities to experience, understand, appreciate, respond to, analyse and create literature across the school years. The challenge for teachers is to address all aspects of a national curriculum to develop capabilities in students that not only allow them to apply basic code-breaking skills to be literate but also to apply meaning-making, analytic and participatory skills to become critically literate. Accordingly, teachers need to deepen students' access to text beyond primarily levelled instructional texts to rich, complex and authentic texts, both print and multimodal, across a wide range of genres, including literature. This study gives voice to the legitimacy of these powerful modes of literature.

The purpose of this study was to build on previous studies and writing and to examine, in a fine-grained manner, which inherent devices trigger a response in students, demonstrating that they are reading the text at a critically literate level; in other words, that they are reading beyond the literal level and are aware of the devices the author is using to position them to receive the intended message. This skill development is also influenced by the complexity of today's rapidly changing and troubled world. The aim is to foster in the reader an awareness that they are being manoeuvred to receive the intended message or view of society that is being proposed by the author (whether it be absurd or serious).

Sipe and McGuire (2008) articulated their understanding of metafictive devices in picturebooks. However, they have not explicitly linked this knowledge to student responses and have not considered the implications of these responses nor how they could be applied to the development of critical literacy. Similarly, Pantaleo (2014) has worked in classrooms identifying students' responses to the metafictive devices in picturebooks. The present study builds on these findings, showing how students can acquire a critically literate voice as they develop a personal agency in relation to their knowledge of metafictive devices, where they are positioned in a text and how the author has used them to influence them as the readers.

The findings of this study will provide important information for teachers and researchers about how teachers can develop their students' ability to be critically literate by selecting pertinent literary texts and explicitly focusing on selected devices. The insights from this study will also assist teachers to select appropriate literary texts (not merely commercially produced graded texts) for their students.

This information will guide teachers in adjusting teaching and learning activities and offering students developmentally suitable literature without compromising student preference, personal taste. This more micro view of being critically literate is in no way intended to diminish the pleasure of exploring this literature with all its idiosyncrasies, whimsy and challenges but to equip our students with a critical voice through which they can be active in not only safeguarding but also developing and promoting a new vision of democratic education through their ability to read, view and express a well-informed view of society (S. Riddle & Apple, 2019). This view of education reinforces the ideology of equipping our students with the skills and personal agency to read, view and express their understandings of a text.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and justifies the methodology, research design and methods used in this study. The first section outlines the purpose of the study and its rationale. The factors that motivated this study are also shared. Following on from the introduction, the methodology, research design and research methods are presented. Table 3.1 highlights this methodology.

Table 3.1

Overarching Methodology

Element	Description
Paradigm	Constructivist/interpretivist paradigm: The belief that knowledge and reality are constructed subjectively (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Houghton et al., 2012).
Ontology	Relativist ontology: The form and nature of reality are subjective and differ from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).
Epistemology	Transactional/subjectivist epistemology: Knowledge is created experientially and socially through dialogue (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).
Theoretical perspective	Social constructivism: Knowledge and meaning are constructed and co-constructed through collaborative interaction with others in a cultural context (Kukla, 2013).
Conceptual frameworks	Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Pedagogy of Multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Staller, 2012). Readers' Circle. Metafictive devices.
Study design	Bounded case study (Stake, 1995).
Study methods	Qualitative methods to collect and analyse data: Interviews, observations and document review, including an analysis of quality picturebooks (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.2 Methodology

In this section, the methodology of this study is explained and justified. The discussion demonstrates that the researcher's philosophical stance, ontological and epistemological worldview and selection of theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks provide structural alignment for the study (see Figure 2.1). These are informed by the key research questions through to the methods that were used to conduct the study.

Given that this study aimed to explore and understand how picturebooks and their metafictive devices influence students' development of critical literacy skills, an

interpretivist paradigm was adopted to guide the study. Within this paradigm, ontological assumptions are relativist while epistemological assumptions are transactional. Research should flow logically from aims to paradigm to method (Creswell, 2009). Based on these assumptions, a constructivist theoretical perspective was adopted and two conceptual frameworks, applicable to exploring critical literacy, were used. These frameworks were considered because they allowed a joint construction of knowledge in the understanding of the metafictive devices in picturebooks. Consistent with this methodological foundation was the decision to employ a small, bounded, intrinsic case study design Stake (1995) as well as qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. This allowed this researcher to answer the questions guiding this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Houghton et al., 2012; Staller, 2012). The following sections discuss these foundational concepts and the interpretative framework (see Figure 2.1).

3.2.1 Conceptualising and Defining the Readers' Circle as a Method of Inquiry

A Readers' Circle is an interactive group activity in which students are supported in reading and discussing a literary text. The selection of the text is of great importance because it will influence the nature of the skills, values and perspectives the teacher wishes to develop in the students. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) used small group discussions to explore metaphors in poetry. Their aim was to develop a critical stance in relation to the understanding of the author's purpose. Readers' Circle offers teachers the opportunity to develop critical literacy, which challenges students to discard a passive acceptance of content. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) reflected on education in the past where students accepted what they read in newspapers or viewed on television as the 'truth'. Comber and Grant (2018) also stated that in developing a critical stance, students need the opportunity to view, critique and feel a sense of agency when expressing ideas about the reporting of local, national and global events. A Readers' Circle may be implemented as part of a literacy program.to offer the opportunity to develop the agency and confidence involved in taking a stance and developing a critically literate voice

After an initial discussion where students gave predictions about the content of the story, the students read the text to themselves. As discussed earlier in the thesis, ideal texts for this activity were quality children's picturebooks containing metafictive devices, and not basal or instructional readers. The aim of these learning

experiences was to go beyond a basic understanding of characters, plot and setting and respond to the metafictive devices that are inherent in these texts. This approach was effective in building confidence in students who were at first hesitant to express an opinion; this was because they could jointly construct meaning with their peers. Literary understanding needs to reflect a depth of understanding that is enriched by sharing ideas and perceptions with other students (Sipe, 2000). Students who did not respond to texts in a sharing situation but only responded in writing exhibited a shallower understanding of the text (Sipe, 2000).

When cultivating and encouraging an environment that promotes in-depth discussion, teachers need to ensure that sessions are interactive and support the students' evolving ability to express complex understandings of a text and how that text is connected to their own experiences (Pantaleo, 2003). This pedagogical method was selected for this study because it offers a constructivist view of knowledge-building. The whole class was engaged to create a scaffold to support the responses of the group. This approach also supported the conceptual framework of this study. It offers engagement for all students in the development of a critical approach and their ability to apply this framework by articulating the 'what' and the 'how' of a multimodal text. In turn, this builds their capacity to confidently challenge or agree with an author's stance in a supportive setting. Engagement with metafictive devices such as intertextuality, irony and self-referentiality, when introduced in the context of a picturebook, offer not only a lens into understanding but also the metalanguage to express that understanding. All students, no matter what their deemed level of literacy development, may be assessed and can benefit from the sharing of ideas to construct meaning in a safe environment.

3.2.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology concerns the study of the nature of being and considers beliefs about reality and the existence of relationships between different aspects of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontological assumptions underpinning the choice of qualitative inquiry as the methodology for this study can be described as relativist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These assumptions are relativist because they depend on the individuals, social and experiential interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Although ontology may be regarded as hypothetical, it can also—as in this study—have a practical application (Jupp, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Critical literacy is grounded in particular epistemological and ontological lenses. The term

critical literacy generally implies developing readers' ability to 'read' with the understanding that (1) words and their interrelations can be used to offer different contexts, viewpoints and positions from which readers can deconstruct and/or construct thoughts and ideas and (2) images can also stand alone, be part of a text, or require an interaction between image and text (Janks, 2014). This was demonstrated by the students' constructions and expressions of meaning in relation to critical literacy, and while it was shared generally, it also varied according to that student's perspective. As noted by Guba and Lincoln (1994), constructions across a group of individuals may be 'more or less informed and/or sophisticated' (p. 111); in this study it was both.

Epistemology concerns the study of knowledge and justified belief (Zalta, 2016), that is, how 'what can be known' can be known. In this study, the epistemological assumptions underpinning the study can be described as transactional/subjectivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The epistemological assumptions are held to be transactional because this study explored how the participants constructed their realities in response to the meanings gained from their interaction with picturebooks containing metafictive devices .. The assumptions are also held to be subjectivist because the participants' constructions of critical literacy depended on their particular social and experiential interactions with picturebooks, which developed and deepened over the course of the study.

In this study, the relationship between the reader and the text was demonstrated by   a constructivist view, whereby the students explored picturebooks containing metafictive devices. The power of these devices was an impetus in the construction of understanding and responding to the author's intent at a critical level rather than at a literal one. The assumption was that a deeper sense of understanding would develop because of the interaction between the researcher and the student (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

3.3 Research Design and Methods

In this section, the research design and specific methods that were used in the study are explained and justified. Information is presented about the design, the context and the selection of the participants. The section also details how students' critical literacy was developed through the Reader's Circle. This is followed by a

description of data sources, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, quality assurance and ethical considerations.

3.3.1 Research Design

The focus of this study is the participants' construction of knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to critical literacy, that is, engaging with a text at a level where the devices used by the author were identified and their impact on the reader considered. Various frameworks underpinning the study (namely, a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm,) were applied in a small, bounded intrinsic case study design, which was the preferred methodology. The choice of a case study design can be justified through the attributes of qualitative research, which supports research in a social setting and allows for a constructivist view of the interactions between the participants, the texts and the teacher. These interactions can illuminate complex interrelationships (Stake, 1995).

Further justification of a case study design lies in the fact that it is a means of social research (Tight, 2010). This study was carried out with members of a Year 3 class (8-year-old students) in a school. Moreover, a case study allows for the exploration of who is involved, the processes, outcomes and context (Boblin et al., 2013). In support of this approach, collaborative meaning-making, as discussed by Peterson and Chamberlain (2015), in their study of students sharing ideas after reading demonstrated the empowering nature of listening to another person's view of the world. These researchers also explored critical discussions that occurred in the classroom to understand students' comprehension of the social issues that are often embedded in texts.

A case study is well-suited to addressing 'how' and 'why' questions (Stake, 1995). This study seeks to answer 'how' and 'why' picturebooks containing metafictive devices enhance the development of critical literacy skills. Stake (1995) also pointed to the advantages of a case study, which focuses on the complexity of a single case in particular circumstances. Case studies can also include the teacher (Stake, 1995); in this study, the researcher took on the role of teacher with the Year 3 class. Naturalistic case studies are defined by emic issues and reflect complex situations (Abma & Stake, 2014). Thus, case studies can offer insights into new relationships by including the researcher in the process, as occurred in this study. The researcher was intimately involved in the evolution of the participants' critically

literate voice, which manifested itself in the form of the Year 3 Book Detectives as the study progressed.

The case study was designated as small because it focused on one class of students located within the larger context of a school. Therefore, the case study was bounded because the system (one class from one primary school) was bounded by both place and time (Creswell, 2014). In a case study, the researcher seeks a deep understanding of the case—in this instance, how the use of picturebooks containing metafictive devices can enhance students' critical literacy skills. Since this is a complex process, the researcher collected multiple forms of data: session recordings, memos, reflections, diary notations, checklists and interviews (Creswell, 2104).

This study was also described as intrinsic because it is exploratory in nature (Grandy, 2010). The researcher worked with the whole class group to explore how picturebooks and their metafictive devices assisted students to become critically literate. The key to this form of case study is that it is an opportunity to learn. In this intrinsic case study, the researcher and the participants experienced multimodal texts as well as the construction of knowledge and experiences, reflecting their understanding of multimodal texts based on their experiences and discussions.

3.3.2 Research Context and Participants

In qualitative research, the researcher needs to purposefully select places and participants (Creswell, 2014). The context for the proposed study is a co-educational faith-based primary school with a population of approximately 443 students (198 girls and 245 boys) located in southeast Queensland. In 2016, the school had a full-time equivalent teaching staff of 25.6 teachers and a full-time equivalent non-teaching staff of 18.3 members. The school is situated in a relatively advantaged community. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage in 2016 indicated that 43% of families were reported within the top quartile while only 6% fell within the bottom quartile for socio-educational advantage (ACARA, 2017).

The participants in the study were a Year 3 class with 23 students nominated by the school principal and in agreement with the class teacher. The group of participants can be described as a small purposeful sample because the individuals have been selected subjectively and do not form a large group from which data can be analysed statistically and findings generalised (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I was familiar with the daily routines of primary schools, and thus was sensitive to the routines and protocols involved in the daily running of the school. Year 3 were also

chosen because they have emerging literacy skills and are at a pivotal point in this development. I was also interested in initially gauging their reactions to picturebooks and being able to dispel any preconceptions about these texts only being for younger readers. I was also interested in observing their ability to read the words and pictures and whether they considered the pictures to be part of the text—in other words, treating the text as being multimodal, which relies on words and pictures to covey the intended message.

3.4 Development of Critical Literacy: Readers' Circle

The pedagogical approach that was used to develop and assess the students' critical literacy skills is a widely used method known as the Reader's Circle (McLaughlin & de Voogd, 2004). This dialogic form of literacy pedagogy is flexible, dynamic, adaptive, context-specific and reveals students' thinking as they critically analyse literary texts in the social context of their classroom. Conducted as an interactive group activity, the approach involves supporting students in reading and discussing the texts. This method proved to be very successful in this study when used as a whole-class approach (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). I have used this pedagogical approach in the past to empower the students to take risks in their responses to texts by creating a structured yet dynamic environment.

In this study picturebooks containing metafictive devices were used. This particular format allowed readers to go beyond a basic understanding of characters, plot and setting to respond to the metafictive devices inherent in these texts. The justification for the choice of texts is detailed in Chapter four. The Readers' Circle allowed me to challenge students to discard a passive acceptance of what they were reading and consider other meanings in the texts. (Janks, 2019). In this study, I was interested in applying this pedagogical practice and involving the entire class, and not just working in small groups. I hold the view that a constructivist approach has the potential to be inclusive and empowering; this stance is examined in detail in later chapters. The flexibility of the approach means this pedagogical practice can be modified. Effective, creative and critical responses to texts can be aligned with original thought and the skills and curiosity to construct how authors communicate their ideas through picturebooks and to consider if the reader agrees with the authors views (Pantaleo, 2017). To give impetus to this critical view of texts, the whole class was involved in the Readers' Circle with a view that the joint construction of

knowledge could be a cumulative and dynamic process, with the potential to give agency to all readers and with the modelling of the teacher avoid the creation of stereotypes. All students in the class were viewed as equal and were not separated into ability groups but rather, formed one organic body of readers and responders. The development of agency was viewed as a personal skill that students learned as a result of their interaction with the Readers' Circle and their construction of responses in relation to a text. This was demonstrated in their critically literate responses as they began to understand and negotiate the metafictive devices in picturebooks as well as the characteristics, codes and conventions that these texts embody (Pantaleo, 2019).

3.5 Data Collection

As noted previously, this study was a small bounded (a single class) intrinsic case study exploring the ways in which picturebooks and their inherent devices influence students' development of critical literacy skills. The development of these skills (the *goal*) by means of engaging with picturebooks (the *vehicle*) was facilitated by a series of scaffolded Reader's Circle discussions (the *process*). Before describing the data sources and the collection of data in detail, justification for using qualitative data in this study is offered.

As noted by Wolcott (1992), qualitative data are naturalistic; as an intense period of study, can offer the qualitative researcher a holistic view of the phenomenon under study. Further, qualitative data offer rich descriptions and explanations; they can also provide a chronological view in which the impact of one event upon another can be gauged (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This became evident as the study progressed, with the evolution of the Year 3 Book Detectives. Moreover, qualitative data can lead to unexpected findings and offer opportunities for the researcher to revise original perspectives and assumptions and perhaps adjust conceptual frameworks (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Creswell (2014) described five steps to collect qualitative data. These were considered in the design of the study and are as follows:

1. choosing participants and sites that are representative, credible and likely to provide insights into the phenomenon under study;
2. acquiring permission to access a site and participants;
3. using or developing suitable instruments for collecting data;

4. collecting data (e.g. interviews and observations); and

5. ensuring that data are collected from participants in a sensitive manner

In relation to collecting data, Creswell (2014) noted there are four main categories of qualitative data: (1) observations, (2) interviews and questionnaires, (3) audio-visual recordings and (4) documents. The sources of data in this study were consistent with those four categories, as discussed in the following sections.

3.5.1 Observations

The two principal forms of observation are participant observation and non-participant observation (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, I took on the role of a participant observer but was afforded the genuine 'cover' of teacher. In this role, I was in a position to observe and record student responses and reactions to picturebooks in the Readers' Circles as well as to interact with the students to challenge their understanding of complex themes. This allowed me to gain deeper insights into the development of their skills of critical literacy, that is, reading and responding to texts at a deeper level, that is not accepting a point of view that was being proposed but considering how they felt about that scenario. I also had opportunities to observe any other factors that may have influenced the participants as well as any ways in which the study evolved or changed in ways specific to the particular study and context (Stake, 1995).

As noted, this was a naturalistic case study, situated in a primary school setting, with the researcher as participant. Consequently, the observation process had the advantage of not being contrived and the natural school setting offered opportunities for authentic observation and the holistic understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Abma & Stake, 2014). This emic focus gave me a unique and authentic opportunity to gather data that accurately reflected the environment in which it was generated. These observations, which took the form of a journal and proved to be very pertinent data, gave me a voice to describe and reflect on the rapid evolution of the participants. It is acknowledged that researchers using observations can have a bias into what is observed, and the method used to record their observations. To counter any bias and ensure accuracy, observational notes should be made as soon as possible after the observation (Johnson et al., 2020). In this study, I returned to my office after each session and immediately recorded my observations (see Appendix B).

Researchers using a case study design need to be skilled at probing the phenomena under investigation; they also need to be highly skilled at questioning and listening (Cohen et al., 2011). The Reader's Circle provided ample opportunities for probing questions following the reading of a text. It created a safe structured environment for the students, with questions already prepared on cards. These questions were randomly assigned to students; students were also allowed to choose the question to which they wished to respond.

3.5.2 Teacher Interview

Interviews are a method of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used in this study to obtain valuable information about the Year 3 teacher's classroom programs, their structure and features. The questions were also used to indicate to the teacher that her thoughts about literacy were valued. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, verified and analysed using thematic analysis of inductive and deductive reasoning. The advantage of this form of data collection using a semi-structured interview in the beginning and a reflection at the end is that the teacher had the opportunity to extend and elaborate upon her initial response and did not feel pressured to think quickly in the interview.

According to Cohen et al. (2011), the researcher needs to have a thorough grasp of the subject being investigated and express rapport and empathy to interact optimally with the participants (in this case, the primary school students and their teacher). Over the course of my 30-year career in education, I have experience as a primary school teacher, a literacy specialist and school leader; I also have 10 years' experience as a lecturer in Initial Teacher Education in literature and literacy development.

The semi-structured individual teacher interview took place in a quiet, private location at the primary school at a time selected by the teacher. I did not take notes as the interview progressed to minimise distractions. The questions posed in the interview included: Could you describe the components of your literacy block? What aspects of literacy development do you think are critical for students? What resources support your literacy program? Are there aspects of your literacy program that you would like to develop further?

3.5.3 Audio-recording

Audio-recording offers the qualitative researcher an unobtrusive method of collecting accurate data (Creswell, 2014). Further, when audio-recording is used in conjunction with observations, it is more likely that a comprehensive record can be obtained (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the semi-structured interview with the teacher was audio-recorded at the beginning of the study. All Reader's Circle sessions were also audio-recorded so that the students' responses and my prompts could be accurately recorded. This proved to be a highly productive and unobtrusive method of collecting data. The students became used to speaking within range of a small handheld device, and in fact, as the study progressed, they were keen to express their views to the device. The audio recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber. The recordings did not contain any information about the location of the school, thereby protecting the privacy of the students.

3.5.4 Documents

As noted by Creswell (2014), documents can provide the qualitative researcher with additional valuable information that shed lights on the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2014). Two sources of documents were used for data analysis: my journal after each Reader's Circle session, the transcript of the semi-structured teacher interview and the audio recordings of each Reader's Circle session. These are listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Data Sources

Sources of data	Data collected
Observation	• Notes on students' participation during each of the 10 Reader's Circles over the duration of the study. • Recording of each Reader's Circle session (researcher and student's dialogue). • Researcher's observational records (each Reader's Circle session).
Interview	• Individual teacher interview before and teacher reflection, following the study. • Transcripts of audio recordings of teacher interview.
Reflective records	• Whole-class oral reflection with students on the experience. • Researcher's reflections (each Reader's Circle session).

3.6 Analyses and Interpretation of Data

The three sources of data were analysed across three stages: (1) repeated reading and memoing, (2) initial recording of the frequency of references to metafictive devices, and (3) describing, classifying and interpreting data into themes. After these stages were completed, the findings were reviewed and initial interpretations were made, addressing the research questions. Table 3.4 gives an overview of this methodology.

3.6.1 Reading and Memoing

After an initial reading of all the written data (notes and transcripts), each set of data was re-read many times so that I could begin to record reflective notes or memos. The memos recorded my ideas, insights and observations about the data and through this process, categories and relationships between categories emerged (Birks et al., 2008). Each memo was dated and cross-referenced to the data so that the researcher's emerging ideas were recorded for future reference as the data analyses and interpretation of data proceeded. The memos identified important incidents in the students' interactions with the picturebooks and the process of developing critical literacy through the interactive Reader's Circle sessions. In particular, the increasingly sophisticated nature of the students' responses was noted, reflecting the movement from quite literal to more analytical. This repeated process was beneficial in that it painted an emerging picture of the students' progress in relation to the research questions and situated me back in the classroom again.

3.6.2 Frequency of References to Metafictive Devices

The second stage in analysing and interpreting the data was a close reading of the transcripts of the Reader's Circle sessions. The frequency of students' references to metafictive devices was recorded, indicating counts for each device in each session. I reviewed the transcript of each session and noted each student's reference to a device on a checklist adapted from the work of Sipe and McGuire (2008). Table 3.3 provides an example of a checklist that includes some of the devices that were to be counted. However, after three weeks, this checklist was abandoned because it was obvious that the students were rapidly gaining an understanding of the metafictive devices within the text. As dozens of ticks were accumulated, the process seemed superfluous; moreover, their understanding was recorded on the audio recorder. As

the researcher it seemed unnecessary to quantify the number of responses to a certain devices, it was the quality of the response I was interested in not the quantity.

Table 3.3

Example of Metafictive Device Frequency Checklist

Metafictive devices – Book 1						
The 'blurring' of the boundaries in literary texts particularly in relation to the relationship between author, narrator and reader						
Subversion, the change in status between the story and 'real' outside world						
Intertextuality, or a pastiche of text, images and ultimately meaning. This may include references to other texts or the insertion of art works						
Multiplicity of meanings within the story and the open-ended conclusions that differ from the 'happily ever after' endings						
Playfulness where the use of semiotics engages the reader into a complex world of symbolism						
Self-referentiality where the reader is unable to view the text from 'outside' the story but develops a relationship within the text						

3.6.3 Identifying, Classifying and Interpreting Themes

The third stage in analysing the data built upon the first two stages and involved identifying themes that were constructed by the researcher from another close reading of the data. The process of identifying and classifying themes was a process of analysis and reflection was also involved as the development of positive reading and text handling behaviours was becoming apparent. This was recorded in my journal, which was written up within two hours of each session to ensure an accurate account of the session. To assist researchers in analysing and reflecting on their data, Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested a series of questions. A 'who, what, when and where' framework is recommended to assist the researcher in crystallising the broad themes emerging from the study. In this study, I used these

themes to create a broad framework from which to gain an overall sense of the findings.

I was aware of the challenge of analysing and interpreting findings from a large body of textual data. Accordingly, the advice of Silverman (2011) was taken. Silverman suggests analysing a small portion of data in the first instance before going on to analyse the entire corpus. In this study, an early analysis of data from the first Reader's Circle session was used to fine-tune the process and ascertain whether additional prompts (general and text-specific) would be required to scaffold the students in their dialogic interactions with each book and the group.

3.6.4 Coding of Data

The coding of data refers to the process of identifying, arranging and systemising ideas, concepts and categories or themes that emerge from close reading of the data (Ayres, 2008). As indicated in the previous section, the coding of data is not a separate stage per se but integral to the process of organising and analysing the data (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2011). The questions, 'who, what, when and where' (Miles & Huberman, 1994), provided an initial starting point for the process of generating ideas and concepts and identifying themes emerging from the data, especially the transcripts of the Reader's Circle sessions.

Following this initial coding of transcripts, another round of coding was required—this time focusing on the research questions and aim of the study rather than the 'who, what, when and where' framework. Indeed, Silverman (2011) suggested that codes and themes need to be expanded upon or refined for a researcher to arrive at the essence of the data. Analysing, coding and interpreting the data from this study was a dynamic, recursive and interpretive process. Nonetheless, the process was clear and described in a transparent manner to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Table 3.4

Overview of Methodology

Research questions	Research methods	Analytical methods
1. To what extent do picturebooks and their metafictive devices influence young children's critically literate voice?	• Qualitative case study • Notes on students' participation in the 10 Reader's Circle sessions during the study • Recording of each Reader's Circle session (researcher and student's dialogue) • Researcher's observational records (each Reader's Circle session) • Researcher's reflections (each Reader's Circle session) • Class teacher reflection	• Reading, reflection and analysis of recordings, transcripts, journal entries and teacher's reflection • Recording themes
2. What pedagogical approaches support children's development of a metalanguage to express their critically literate voice?	• Constructivist approach to whole-class Readers' Circle • Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1990, 1997, 1999, 2003) • Multiliteracies (NLG, 1996)	• Classroom observations in weekly journal read and analysed with reference to text analyst and text participant • Application to life situations
3. Does the expression of a metalanguage related to picturebooks with metafictive devices empower children's critically literate voice?	• Notes on students' participation in the 10 Reader's Circle sessions during the study • Recording of each Reader's Circle session (researcher and student's dialogue) • Researcher's observational records (each Reader's Circle session) • Researcher's reflections (each Reader's Circle session)	• Careful reading and re-reading of journal notes and recording transcripts • Notes • Development and emergence of the critically literate voice • Recognition and articulation of metafictive devices • Author's intent • Features of picturebooks • Structure and features of text and peritext

3.7 Quality Assurance

The researcher's role includes establishing the trustworthiness of their study. Guba (1981) proposed four criteria that continue to be widely accepted by qualitative researchers seeking to assure others of the quality and trustworthiness of their work (Shenton, 2004). These four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability—are discussed in the following sections.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to whether readers (including other researchers and possibly the participants themselves) judge the research to make sense (Jensen, 2008b). A researcher needs to assure others that the phenomenon under investigation and the methods used in conducting the study were as intended. Merriam (1998) described this as congruence between the study and reality.

To establish credibility, reliable and well-established research methods need to be adopted. The researcher also needs to become familiar with the culture and situation in which the study is to take place. In this study, in my role as teacher, I familiarised myself with the selected school, initially meeting the students and sharing a book with them to introduce herself and the research. The students were able to ask questions at this meeting.

I have spent 30 years in a primary school environment in the capacity of classroom teacher and in all leadership roles. These experiences equipped me with the necessary sensitivities to work with the participants in the school setting. Routines and protocols are part of my prior knowledge and were of great assistance in negotiating the school environment. Morse et al. (2002) have emphasised the importance of establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study as it progresses, not just at the end when verification and adjustment will not be possible. They have also pointed out that qualitative research needs this rigour to avoid the tag of unreliability.

Credibility can also be enhanced by triangulation of data sources; that is, utilising different forms and methods of data collection (Rothbauer, 2008). This can be achieved by using different strategies such as observation, interviews, audio-visual recordings and documents (Creswell, 2014). By using different methods of data collection, the researcher can focus on the strengths of each method, which in a compensatory way, overcomes the shortcomings of each type of data (Brewer &

Hunter, 1989). In this study, the above method was employed as one of the measures to demonstrate credibility.

Frequent debriefings with the participants also supported the credibility of the study as ideas and points raised in the Reader's Circle were reviewed, discussed and clarified. Each Reader's Circle session was recorded. This allowed me to review the sessions and adjust the process as required.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to whether a researcher can claim that the findings of their study can be transferred to other contexts and situations (Merriam, 1998). Two strategies—thick description and purposeful sampling—can be used to assure readers of the transferability of the study and its findings (Jensen, 2008d). Providing rich, thick descriptions of the study and the phenomenon under investigation means that other researchers can extend the current findings. According to Shenton (2004), the information conveyed should contain the following: the number of organisations involved, any restrictions that applied to the collection of data, the number of participants, the type of data collected, the collection methods used, the period over which the data were collected and the sessions at which the data were collected.

With regard to purposeful sampling, the researcher needs to provide sufficient information about the participants and how they were selected so that readers (and other researchers) can judge how well the findings of the study can be applied to other participants and contexts. I believe that the results of the current study indicate that the progress of the Year 3 students (as documented in later chapters) would not be a difficult concept to introduce into schools. Indeed, it is the requirement of a national curriculum that not only equips students with skills that are essential in a multimodal world but is also an empowering and exciting experience, as demonstrated in this study. The class teacher informed me that the students counted down the days to the next session.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the assurance that the researcher has maintained careful tracking and transparent record-keeping, despite a constantly evolving research context and despite the findings only being interpreted in relation to this changing backdrop (Jensen, 2008c). Dependability is closely related to the positivist construct of reliability, whereby researchers are given assurance that a particular study can be replicated, yielding similar results (Shenton, 2004). Guba and Lincoln

(1995) stated that there is an overlap with credibility as one ensures a demonstration of the other. The use of similar methods such as interviews could be employed. As previously stated, the provision of detailed information regarding procedures would guide future researchers in conducting their own study.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the basic goals of qualitative research, namely, that the phenomenon under study has been understood from the perspective of the participants (in this case, the students developing critical literacy through dialogic engagement with picturebooks containing metafictive devices) and that the meanings that the participants construed (critical literacy) have also been understood by the researcher (Jensen, 2008a). Shenton (2004) noted that to ensure confirmability, the research report needs to reflect the voice of the informants, and not that of the researcher. This is made evident in later chapters.

Triangulation is also important in establishing the confirmability of findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that the predispositions of the researcher must be made clear; this can be achieved through a reflexive statement to make any possible bias clear to the reader. An audit trail also gives other researchers the tools to trace the gathering of data and the processes used in their collection. A theoretical audit trail that communicates the concepts behind the study will also give future researchers the structure and information upon which to develop similar studies or extend the existing one.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research involving human participants, especially children, raises complex questions in relation to ethical behaviour and legal issues, including the protection of the children. Creswell (2014) has listed a number of important safeguards that researchers need to consider to protect the participants of a study:

1. All objectives must be articulated clearly, both verbally and in written format.
2. Written permission must be obtained from all parties.
3. A formal application must be made to an ethics committee.
4. All forms of data collection must be clearly articulated.
5. All written data must be provided to the participants if requested.
6. The participants' rights must be considered first in regard to the types of data collection.

7. All participants must remain anonymous.

Once confirmation of candidature had been achieved, I successfully applied to the University of Southern Queensland for approval to conduct her study. The ethics requirements were consistent with the rights, values and protection outlined in Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2007) and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2015).

These two national agreements, which govern the work of all researchers in Australia, guide researchers in terms of a number of important considerations. In the following section, selected considerations are linked to actions that were taken to minimise risk to the participants.

1. Research merit and integrity: This study focused on developing students' critical literacy skills, a capability emphasised in the national curriculum. To date, the explicit influence of metafictive devices on the development of critical literacy skills voice has received limited attention.

2. Justice: There was no unfair burden or disruption to the participants as a result of the intervention (Reader's Circle sessions), which took place during the class literacy block.

3. Beneficence: The participating students received additional literacy instruction from an experienced educator over a period of approximately 10 weeks.

4. Respect: Both teacher and student participants were treated with respect and afforded any support they needed as key members of the literacy project.

5. Risk: The study was designed to minimise risk (low-risk category application). The participants were all volunteers who were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without comment or penalty. The researcher is also an experienced teacher and a registered member of the relevant teacher registration body.

6. Informed written consent and assent: Participants only took part in the study after first being informed of its purpose and then signing written informed consent forms. The participants were also asked for consent to take part in the Reader's Circle sessions. All students and their parents gave consent.

7. Research methods: This research is a small bounded intrinsic case study that involved the collection of qualitative data by means of an individual

interview and reflection (with the teacher) and observations, note-taking and audio recordings of the Reader's Circle sessions (with the students). Hence, data collection was carried out in a professional and low-key manner as befits a classroom setting.

8. Institutional responsibilities: The researcher met the requirements of the rigorous ethics application process University of Southern Queensland, which was consistent with the national ethics guidelines (NHMRC, 2007, 2015).

Once ethical approval had been granted, permission was obtained to conduct the study in the school. Once this permission had been granted, informed written consent was then obtained from the teacher who had agreed to participate in the study as well as the parents of the children who had been recommended for the study by their teacher. Finally, written and oral assent was obtained from the students before the research sessions began.

3.9 Possible Limitations of the Study

Creswell (2014) explained that study limitations are potential weaknesses, as identified by the researcher. Stating these limitations is of assistance to future researchers who may wish to carry out a similar study.

Three limitations were identified in the current study. First, the study was designed as a small bounded case study. Consequently, the findings may not be transferable to the context of other schools. Second, the participants comprised a small purposefully selected sample of 23 Year 3 students whose academic functioning and achievement generally fell within age-level expectations. Accordingly, the findings cannot be applied with any confidence to more diverse group of students. Third, the study was conducted over a period of 10 weeks. In the planning stage, it was not known whether this would be sufficient time for the students to make expected and demonstrable progress in developing their critical literacy skills. However, this concern proved to be unfounded, as revealed in later chapters so was not in reality a limitation but an initial concern.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented and justified the methodology, research design and methods that were used to conduct the study. The study was designed to examine how primary students' engagement with and responses to picturebooks containing metafictive devices could lead them beyond a narrow view of reading to develop a

critically literate voice. In particular, the study was designed to explore the impact of the metafictive devices—as identified by Sipe and McGuire (2008)—on students' ability to perceive and critique the messages in these multimodal texts and thus develop their own understandings and beliefs about the world in which they live. Naming the devices was a strategy to focus the students' attention on the way that authors use these devices to give a certain point of view. By using the correct terminology the students were given a voice with which to express their point of view and understanding of the author's intent.

After this introduction, this chapter focused on the research methodology, emphasising the structural alignment of the study. This alignment could be tracked from the research question, through to the constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm and to the relativist ontological and transactional/subjectivist epistemological assumptions consistent with this paradigm. The alignment could further be tracked to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that supported the selection of a bounded case study design and the qualitative methods for collecting data.

The study findings, derived through a Readers' Circle approach to developing students' critical literacy skills, supported the use of this approach with high-quality picturebooks containing metafictive devices. The approach represented an effective way for primary teachers to challenge themselves and their students to discard the passive acceptance of texts, shifting to a more critical stance in relation to understanding the author's purpose and devices (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Pantaleo, 2019; Sipe & McGuire, 2008). The development of critical literacy skills is clearly prescribed in the national curriculum (ACARA, 2019a) but to date, there has been minimal support for teachers on specific ways to scaffold opportunities for students to read, analyse and critique a much wider range of texts. Students need such teaching to prepare them for functioning in an information-rich multimodal world in which they must negotiate their way as citizens in a complex world of written and visual texts but also make informed decisions as they come to understand the many texts that bombard them as readers of their world.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis: Picturebooks and Metafictive Devices

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses the metafictive devices used in the picturebooks, which were the resource used in this study to develop critical literacy in the participants. The chapter is structured as follows: (i) synopsis of each text, with explicit reference to the narrative; (ii) examination of the metafictive devices of each text, with reference to specific pages; (iii) explanation of why each text was selected, and (iv) reflections on classroom observations, based on field notes, confirming the impact the texts and their metafictive devices on the students. While it is acknowledged that there is a diverse range of texts available to the researcher these texts have been previously trialled by the researcher and found to be effective in introducing students to a different view of reading (and viewing) a text. They contain themes that are familiar to young children which was considered to develop a sense of confidence when reading these texts for the first time. The students in this study had not read these texts previously.

An overview of the books is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Texts Used in This Study and Their Metafictive Devices

Text	Author	Acknowledgements/Awards	Metafictive devices (Sipe & McGuire, 2006)	Theme	Example
The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley	Colin Thompson	Children's Book Council of Australia winner Aurealis Award	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Consumerism Humans' quest for the 'next best thing'	Graffiti on works of art Irony Varied page layout Hyperbole
The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness	Colin Thompson	CBCA winner Aurealis Award	2, 3, 5, 6	Family dynamics, how an act of kindness changed a family	Page layout, use of space and semiotics
Gorilla	Anthony Browne	Children's Laureate (England) Hans Christian Andersen Award Kate Greenaway Medal	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Daughter/father relationship Child's perceptions and reality	Reference to works of art, movies Symbolic use of banana, door Layout and spaces created
The Tunnel	Anthony Browne	Children's Laureate (England) Hans Christian Andersen Award Kate Greenaway Medal	2, 3, 4, 6	Sibling relationships	*Little Red Riding Hood* references Symbolism of stone 'melting'
The Heart and the Bottle	Oliver Jeffers	Bisto Book of the Year New York Emmy Award Irish Book Award Orbil Prize Children's Books Ireland (CBI) Book Award	1, 2, 4, 5, 6	Coping with the grief of loss of a loved one	Symbolism of protecting a heart from pain in a bottle
The Three Pigs	David Wiesner	Caldecott Medal winner Quill Award	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	A fairy tale re-imagined	Traditional storyline, 'broken', multiple story lines

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Text	Author	Acknowledgements/Awards	Metafictive devices (Sipe & McGuire, 2006)	Theme	Example
		Hans Christian Andersen finalist			
The Lost Thing	Shaun Tan	CBCA winner Academy Award for Animation winner L. Ron Hubbard Award Ditmar Award Boston Globe Winner	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Modern society-inward gaze Who belongs and do we notice the difference?	Multiple symbolism and semiotics, large red 'thing' Questions posed, unanswered
The Singing Hat	Tohby Riddle	CBCA winner New South Wales Premier's Literary Award	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Difference in society What really matters Mental illness	Multiple use of semiotics Open-ended conclusion Questions unanswered
No Bears	Meg McKinlay	(CBCA Notable Picturebook of the Year 2018 Prime Minister's Literary Award (Winner 2016) Queensland Literary Award (Winner 2015) Aurealis Award (Winner 2015) Environment Award for Children's Literature CBCA Honour Book (2016); Shortlisted (2011, 2012) Davitt Award (Winner 2012)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Re-imagining of fairy tales, gentle mocking of and by the narrator	Narrator addresses the reader. Irony, there is a bear on every page manipulating the story and the reader Multiple instances of other texts Playful use of font and page layout

The literary devices within these texts set them apart from picturebooks or illustrated storybooks as they are tools used by the author to elicit a response. The devices are listed below, and they can involve the illustrations or the words. In these texts, the reader must not only read the text but also 'read' the pictures. Anstey and Bull (2000) advocated the use of these picturebooks for the development of critical literacy, stating that readers need to acquire the ability to interrogate a book. These texts invite a reader to be intimately involved in the story; for example, by offering the reader opportunities for co-authorship through the presentation of multiple storylines—a feature that Goldstone (2004) described as a powerful position for the reader. These texts also offer counterpoint, which can create different opportunities for interpretation. Counterpoint of address that creates gaps—both textual and visual—can also empower the reader to offer a unique interpretation of the text. In other words, the reader is invited to co-author the story and fill in the deliberate gaps that are present in the words or pictures (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). The unique devices in these picturebooks, as defined by Sipe and McGuire (2008) and as discussed in Chapter 2, are referred to in this chapter. These include:

1. the 'blurring' of the boundaries in literary texts;
2. subversion, or the change in status between the story and 'real' outside world;
3. intertextuality, or the layering of many different texts within the one text;
4. multiplicity of meanings within the story and the open-ended conclusions;
5. playfulness, where the use of semiotics draws the reader into a complex world of symbolism; and
6. self-referentiality, where the reader is unable to view the text from outside the story.

These devices illuminate the sophistication of children's picturebooks containing metafictive devices and offer guidance for educators on providing students with opportunities to become critically literate; by negotiating and exploring these devices, students enter into the advanced process of interpretation, a key aim of this study.

> *My initial meeting was with the classroom teacher in November 2018, the year before I began my interaction with Year 3. The classroom teacher was very enthusiastic about me working in her class. I briefly gave her an overview of the study and a copy of the proposed study as some background*

reading. The teacher agreed to meet again in January and work out the session times during Terms 1 and 2.

The meeting discussed the process by which students would engage with picturebooks with metafictive devices in a whole-class Readers' Circle format to develop the skills of being critically literate. After an initial discussion about what the literary texts contain, students in this Year 3 read the texts to themselves, noticing and responding to the devices that are inherent in these picturebooks. In the discussion that followed, the students' individual reading and understanding is enriched by sharing ideas and perceptions with other students. Initially students' responses were to be scaffolded by cards, with prompts to initiate discussion. An extract from the field notes in each section gives an insight into how this study unfolded.

Table 4.2 summarises the 10 sessions with the Year 3 participants (who became the Year 3 Book Detectives).

Table 4.2

Title Sessions summary

Session	Book	Lesson format
Orientation to the study	*Fox* (Margaret Wild)	Introduced myself. Asked children about books. Outlined the study for the class. Read *Fox*.
Session 1	*The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Colin Thompson)	Introduced book. Students read to themselves. Short and limited discussion. Students encouraged to read the words and the pictures. More productive discussion. Intertextuality explained and referenced in the book.
Session 2	*The Three Pigs* (David Wiesner)	Routine established to book distribution. Cards with questions about the text introduced. Students more conscious of words and pictures. Discussion followed with more depth. One student remembered intertextuality. Irony introduced as a device.
Session 3	*Gorilla* (Anthony Browne)	Routine followed. Students more engaged in reading words and pictures. Identified intertextuality. Richer discussion. Identified the author's message.
Session 4	*No Bears* (Meg McKinlay)	Routine followed without prompting. Very engaged reading. Enthusiastic discussion. Intertextuality and irony identified. Students identified as 'Book Detectives' searching for clues in the text. Prompt cards not needed.
Session 5	*The Tunnel* (Anthony Browne)	Students followed routine with no prompting. Before reading, explored the peritext, discussed quietly with a neighbour. Read intently. Rich discussion followed, theme identified.
Session 6	*The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (Colin Thompson)	Students initiate lesson routine. Students very focused on reading. Metafictive devices discussed.
Session 7	*The Singing Hat* (Tohby Riddle)	Students initiate lesson routine. Very focused reading of a challenging text. Discussion about the illustrative style and message behind the text.

Session	Book	Lesson format
Session 8	*The Heart and the Bottle* (Oliver Jeffers)	Students initiate lesson routine. The author's tools or devices discussed before reading. Students read intently. Some went back and re-read. Discussion started slowly then quickly became intense with the sombre message of the text revealed. Very at ease with the subject matter. Sessions are lasting up to an hour now.
Session 9	*The Lost Thing* (Shaun Tan)	Students initiate lesson routine. End papers discussed. Read very intently. Rich discussion followed. Pictures read carefully. Unprompted, many began re-reading the book.
Session 10	*The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Colin Thompson) reviewed	Students initiate lesson routine. Intently read the book. Rich discussion ensued. Intertextuality, irony, use of fonts and self-referentiality discussed. Watched the animated version to wrap up.

4.2 *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005)

4.2.1 Synopsis

The first book to be introduced as part of the study was *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley,* written by Colin Thompson. This book was reviewed both in the first and last week of the study. The story is about a happy rat named Riley who has everything he wants in life—a warm place to live, a home and a loving family. The irony is that rats have a fairly short life span compared with humans, yet humans are not as happy or uncomplicated. Thompson compares people's lives to that of a rat, and humans are not shown in a favourable light because of their constant quest to attain more and more materialistic possessions instead of being like Riley, who is satisfied with the basic requirements of life.

4.2.2 Metafictive Devices

This text is rich in metafictive devices; Thompson uses a mocking tone to accentuate the fact that material possessions will not make you happy. He does this through the use of complex hyphenated sentences that accentuate humans' quest for the latest of … everything. This device, which Sipe and McGuire (2008) describe as

playfulness, is also present in the arrangement of words and pictures on the page and the use of an elaborate font.

The effect of the exaggerated hyphenation is that when the text is read, human greed is obvious, for example, 'people want double-fudge-chocolate-caviar-sausage-gourmet-jumbo-size-cow-sheep-chicken-with-extra-thick-whipped-cream-and-msg-burger' (p. 9). This frenetic pace is contrasted with Riley's needs: 'All Riley wanted was a little stick with a pointy end to scratch the bit of his back he couldn't reach himself' (p. 11). While the text uses humour and irony, the more sombre message of human greed becomes apparent to the reader. Serafini (2012), in his reconceptualising of the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990), viewed the student as 'reader–viewer' (p. 152) of multimodal texts. The reader needs to develop the skills to interpret these often complex texts and, using the practices described by Luke and Freebody (1997, 1999), not only read the words but also fully interrogate, navigate and express their understanding of the story.

Figure 4.1

Metafictive Devices

The exaggerated use of hyphenated sentences introduce not only a mocking tone but have a playful and ironic focus in the text to deliver the message of over consumerism. Self referentiality is also present as the reader interprets the image and relates it to their own life experience. Grieve (1993) wrote about the innovative use of devices in picturebooks and the beguiling nature of the spaces and parody within a text.

People want double-fudge-chocolate-caviar-sausage-gourmet-jumbo-size-baby-cow-sheep-chicken-with-extra-thick-whipped-cream-and-msg-sauce-burger.

Some of which is gross, some cruel and most, unhealthy.
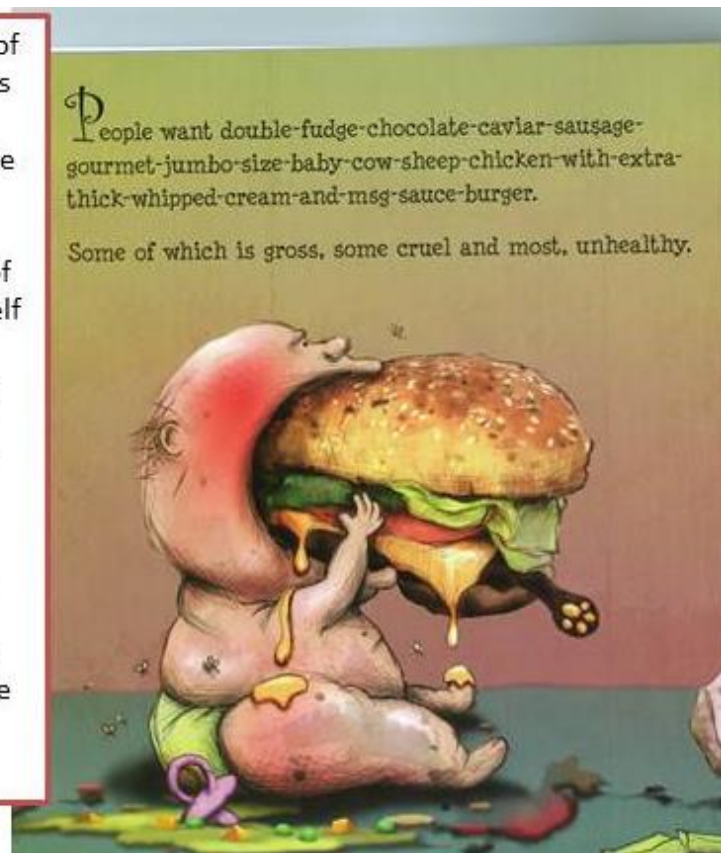
Intertextuality is another device that is used to great effect in this text. There is a rich pastiche of famous paintings that have been graffitied, for example, van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* (1889) has a bowler hat included as does da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503). These paintings, along with others, are used across a double-spread with hyphenated text that describes humans' attempts to be 'taller-shorter-thinner-here-but-much-bigger-there…' (p. 17). Munch's (1893) painting, *The Scream*, is used on a page that states that if you compare your life to that of an animal, 'you will only end up feeling depressed' (p. 27).

The blurring of boundaries between author, narrator and reader is also evident as Thompson adopts a conversational tone in his comparison of the lives of people and animals. The reader is drawn into the text in an almost conspiratorial mode, as if part of the mocking of humans' obsession with acquisitions and a better life. Goldstone (2004) stated that these texts 'prod and tease the reader' as if asking them,

'Do you understand what the story is about and what the author is trying to say?' (p. 201).

Self-referentiality is another device used to great effect because the reader is familiar with many of the desires of the hapless humans in the text. The final page pushes home the meaning of the text in a simple sentence, which contrasts with the hyperbole that precedes: 'And the answer is very simple, really, you just have to be happy with a lot less' (p. 29). The illustration is of a man dressed very simply, eating an ice block, with a dog on a lead.

4.2.3 Why This Text?

I chose this text not only because it is high-quality children's literature, validated by awards such as CBCA 'Picturebook of the Year' (2006), but also because it contains all six metafictive devices. The text is quite challenging because of the inclusion of these metafictive devices. It is precisely for this reason that I decided to introduce this text early on in the study, to observe the students' response to such a complex and richly layered story and to gauge their ability to engage with metafictive devices in picturebooks. I was also interested in their ability to respond as a group and build up the meaning of the text in a constructivist manner by acting as text analysts (Luke & Freebody, 1999). The text was also reviewed at the end of the study to gauge whether the students' engagement with the picturebooks and their progressive acquisition of a metalanguage enhanced their ability to respond to the text with a more critical stance.

Lewis (2001) argued that texts containing metafictive devices can be unsettling for the reader. The glimpse of Riley's world presents the reader with a disconcerting view of over-consumerism, reinforced through the use of irony. Since this text is a comment on society, the reader can receive a very pertinent message without a confrontational edict from the author, with the message conveyed instead through a wry and ironic tale holding a deeper message (Vasquez et al., 2019).

In the second reading of *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005), the message of over-consumerism was recognised by the students. This was in contrast to the first reading, when there was very limited critical engagement. This was partly because the students were still a little surprised that Year 3 students would want to read a picturebook. This resistance needed to change before their engagement became more active, as demonstrated in Chapter 6.

Moreover, at that stage, the students did not have the metalanguage to express their understandings at a critical level.

4.2.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 1*: The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005)

While I was not nervous, I was a little anxious on how the lesson would unfold, especially taking a whole-class approach to the Readers' Circle, also the fact that this was not my class. I need not have worried, the students keen to accept me and participate in the lesson. The teacher stated previously that they had learned about making connections with a text and predicting what the text would be about, but at this stage that application was not evident. A few questions were asked about the cover of the text and the students began to read. A few students took their time and studied the illustrations, but most just quickly flicked through the pages.

I did not go into any lengthy explanations as we were going to revisit this text at the conclusion of the study. When asked did the text need illustrations, they agreed that it did so you could understand, but that was the extent of the discussion.

I then explained what intertextuality was and that it was a device authors used to tell the story. One student knew what 'inter' meant and another picked up on the word 'text'.

No one commented that the illustrations were part of the text and that you had to read them.

Week 10: Riley revisited; *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005)

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end! Today was my last day with the Book Detectives and was a wonderful celebration of literature. We revisited the first book that we shared. The metamorphosis that has occurred with these students is exciting. Reading picturebooks is not treated with disdain (which was a personal observation and their initial lack of engagement with picturebooks is referred to in my journal which is attached as appendix B) as was in the beginning and they have demonstrated the ability to read quite complex texts and openly share their understandings without fear of someone criticising their interpretation. They are demonstrating an ability to interrogate a text and are reading the words and

the pictures. Their understanding of the message in Riley *was expressed as*
the fact that we don't need a profusion of material possessions to be happy.
They discussed the devices Thompson used to give us that message.

     The power of the whole-class approach has been very successful and
the fact that each child had a copy of the same book made a great deal of
difference to all the readers, but especially the ones who struggled with
reading, as they were part of whole class discussions and did not need to
have a simpler text to accommodate their perceived needs.

4.3 *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001)

4.3.1 Synopsis

     In Week 2, I introduced *The Three Pigs*, written and illustrated by David
Wiesner. The story begins as a traditional children's tale: 'Once upon a time there
were three pigs that went out in the world to seek their fortune' (p. 1). After page 2,
the story changes dramatically in the words, and particularly the illustrations, which
depict the pigs being blown out of the story.

Figure 4.2

Metafictive Devices
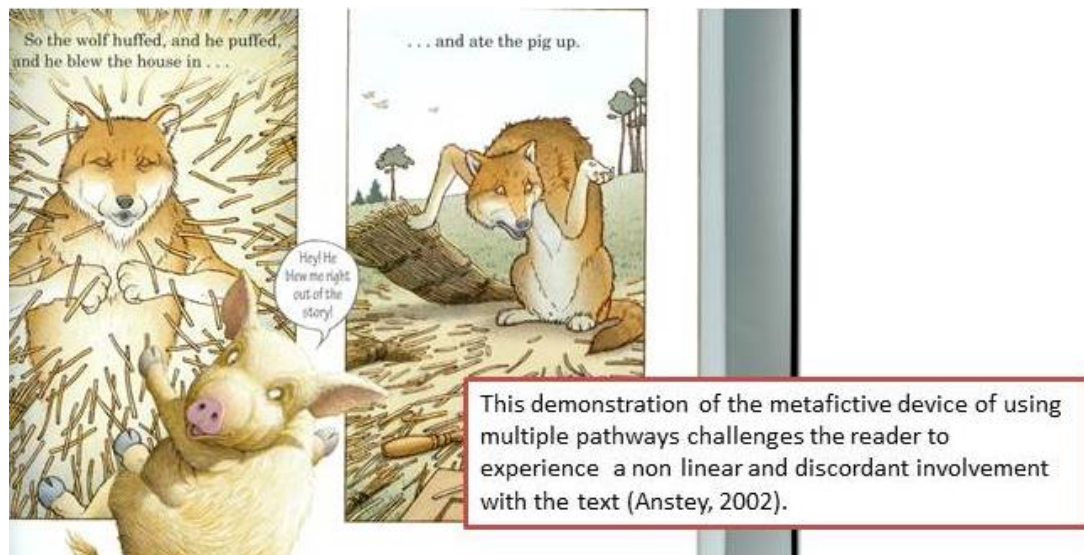
     The illustrations take on a more realistic style as the pigs travel on a paper
aeroplane into other stories and rhymes. After collecting a number of other characters
from children's literature, for example, the cat from *Hey Diddle* (1765) and a dragon,
they all end up in their own story and eventually, back in the home of the third pig

where they are once again challenged by a bewildered wolf. However, this time the wolf is confronted by the dragon.

4.3.2 Metafictive Devices

This story is told using a variety of metafictive devices, as indicated in the beginning when the story loses its linear format and the pigs are blown out of the initial story into one of their own creation. The words are also in a non-linear format, with the pigs appearing to talk to themselves at times and interrupt the narrator.

The playful arrangement of text and illustrations on the page is another device, with the narration appearing in traditional format at certain times and then alternating to speech bubbles at other times. The reader is not always addressed as the pigs speak to themselves and each other. Irony is also present because the traditional narration states that the wolf blew the house down and ate the pigs, but the reader can see that the pigs are alive and well and travelling into another time zone. Pantaleo (2009) investigated the multiple ways in which a text can be constructed and how students need exposure to the complexities of texts to apply this skill of reading many points of view to the reading of other socially produced media texts.

Intertextuality is present with the inclusion of characters from other texts (*Hey Diddle Diddle*) while self-referentiality is present as the reader is drawn into wondering how the text is being constructed and is not allowed to adopt a neutral perspective. Sipe and McGuire (2008) have referred to this as readers having their expectation of the storyline challenged and distorted so that they must become active participants in the life of the story. No longer can readers sit on the fence and observe; instead, they are challenged to question how and why the events are unfolding in a particular manner. The practices of the Four Resources Model (Luke & Freebody, 1997, 1999) give the reader the skills to interpret these texts as well as to understand and challenge them from a critical standpoint, particularly in the role of text user and text critic.

Sipe and McGuire (2008) maintained that the use of self-referentiality draws the reader into the text to try to understand why and how the story is being communicated. In other words, reading is no longer a passive exercise. In her studies of students reading of picturebooks with metafictive devices, Pantaleo (2005) stated that these devices give students agency because they have to actively engage with the texts and become involved in their own meaning-making. The ability to read from a critical stance gives students the ability to transfer this understanding and skill to

their experiences of living in the real world. Freire (1970) pointed out that this skill empowers citizens to make informed choices about their lives.

4.3.3 Why This Text?

I chose this text because it is an example of outstanding children's literature, as indicated by the book winning the Caldecott Medal. The text also uses a range of metafictive devices that 'lure' the reader into the story; the narrative opens as a traditional tale but is later interrupted in a challenging yet playful way which is in contrast to traditional narratives. This text demands that a critical stance be taken by readers, who must fully engage in the unfolding story through their critical literacy skills. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) pointed out that readers of these texts need to employ the strategies of Luke and Freebody's (1999) model, especially the role of being a text critic. Readers need the power to imagine different ways of interpreting a story and challenge their previous view of what it is to read and understand a text. This ability to take a more critical stance when reading and viewing such texts is the aim of this study. This book worked well in Week 2 because it demonstrated the device of self-referentiality. The students had previous knowledge of reading a text that was introduced into the story and this was where we began to develop the metalanguage of intertextuality. The book had many such examples that the students could immediately recognise.

4.3.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 2: *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001)

I decided to use the prompt cards to give the students ideas for asking questions and responding to the texts. I explained to students about reading a picturebook—that you read the words and the pictures as though they depend on each other to tell the story. I noticed during this reading that some students returned to the text when they had finished reading to check the words and pictures to work out meaning. I asked if they remembered from last week what we call a text within a text. One student said 'intertext'. That was exciting! The whole class then proceeded to see how many examples of intertextuality they could find in the book. This was a turning point as the students enjoyed searching through the book for examples. Next, we discussed irony and what it looked like in a text. They had not heard this term before but seemed to understand the concept and look for examples within the text (this observation is in the field notes).

4.4 *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983)

4.4.1 Synopsis

In Week 3, I introduced the story, *Gorilla*, written and illustrated by Anthony Browne. Family relationships are a common topic in children's literature. Browne included this theme in his book, which had only three characters—Hannah, her father and the gorilla. There are many 'absences' in the text (no mention of other family members) and Hannah is feeling neglected by her father, who is always too busy to talk to her.

For her birthday, Hannah requests a gorilla because this is her favourite animal (it may be Browne's as well since he features them in other stories). Hannah wakes during the night and sees a toy gorilla at the bottom of her bed. She is very disappointed and throws the toy away. In the toy's place, a real gorilla appears and asks her whether she would like to go to the zoo and see the gorillas. Obviously, Hannah agrees and as the gorilla dresses in her father's coat, they swing their way through the trees to the zoo. They visit the primates and Hannah thinks they look very sad behind bars. After the zoo, they go to the movies and watch *King Kong* (1933)—an example of intertextuality—and then they have a feast. Hannah is returned home and lovingly tucks the toy gorilla into bed. The next morning, Hannah's father offers to take her to the zoo for her birthday. Hannah is delighted and as he bends over her, she notices a banana in his back pocket.

4.4.2 Metafictive Devices

This text contains metafictive devices that pose questions for the reader. Intertextuality is used in the paintings around the house, which show gorillas instead of the original content—Whistler's Mother (1871) is pictured as a gorilla.

Figure 4.3

Metafictive Devices

Intertextuality is present in this illustration (as in many of Browne's picturebooks). Beckett (2010) argued that intertextuality which is a form of artistic illusion may seem to be difficult for children to interpret. However this is a very commonly used metafictive device and children have demonstrated the ability to decode the relevance of the images.

This is a key page in the text with the mix of reality and fantasy. The subversion of traditional stories is demonstarted in this disruption to the seemingly normal narrative and is a feature of picturebooks containing metafictive devices (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

The author has left a number of thought-provoking clues in his use of colour, the placement of objects on the page to indicate distance between the main characters and hints in the illustrations. Other pathways are hinted at in the story… Did the gorilla really take Hannah to the zoo in the middle of the night? Why does the front door have two handles? Why does the father's coat fit the gorilla? Is the father's apparent disinterest in his daughter imagined? The subversion of literary traditions is evident in the question of two worlds—reality and Hannah's trip with the gorilla. What appears to be an everyday account of a child's life suddenly takes a fantastical twist… or did it really happen?

The self-referentiality in the text does not allow the reader to passively accept the storyline. There are too many clues suggesting that this might or might not have happened. Why is a banana poking out of the father's back pocket?

Non-linearity is used with the usual events in Hannah's life being recounted. This is interrupted by the second story of her adventures with the gorilla, which breaks away from the original text. Quality children's literature is complex and rich in content and literary devices that challenge readers to use their imagination to make

sense of the story (Ewing et al., 2016). The storyline not being linear makes it more beguiling because the element of personal meaning-making and imagination is in the hands of the reader.

The importance of the visual images in this text amplifies the metafictive devices. Hannah dancing in the night with the gorilla while the other gorillas and their partners waltz behind them adds to the mystery of the non-linear device and provokes the question: What is real? Serafini (2009) asserted that the interplay of image and text in picturebooks draws upon multiple avenues of information for the reader. This multimodal text offers the reader many experiences, from the literal to the imaginative; the power is with the reader. We need to offer students the opportunity to form an alternative view of the text and *Gorilla* offers this alternative view (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

4.4.3 Why This Text?

I selected this text since it is an excellent example of a picturebook containing metafictive devices. Anthony Browne has won many awards, including the Kate Greenaway Medal and the Hans Christian Andersen Award; he is also England's Children's Laureate (2009–2011). Browne deals with family issues that affect children's lives in a relatable yet at times fantastical way. He allows readers to interpret the message they choose through the use of metafictive devices, which empowers readers to select their own pathway through the story.

Browne also effectively uses self-referentiality to portray the feelings of a young child who thinks that her father is not interested in her. This misconception is dispelled in the conclusion of the text, but not without an ironic twist of a banana in the father's back pocket. This device draws the reader into the text, who thereby becomes part of the process of its creation (Lewis, 2001). Thus, the sensitive message in this story is effectively conveyed to the reader through the use of metafictive devices.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) stressed that if we are to prepare our students for a multimodal world, we must empower them with the skills to critically interpret both modes of communication—the written and the visual, which is the aim of this study. This text was a turning point in the study as the students began to display practices of interrogating the text. They would read and then go back through the text looking for clues and information. They were able to articulate the message within

the text about Hannah wanting to spend more time with her father and identified intertextuality within the story.

4.4.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 3: *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983)

Today was a Red-Letter Day! I can see a shift in the students reading of the texts. Today's session went for over an hour and the students were fully engaged. At the end of the session, the classroom teacher said that she couldn't believe the change in the way they were reading the texts. They are reading back after they are finished and checking ideas and clues to the message in the story, so they are not just reading at face value but delving into the text. The majority of the class could recall what intertextuality was and actively looked for examples without being prompted. One student made the connections between the gorilla, New York and King Kong. They are beginning to move from the literal to the critical level in their responses and in the way they read the text.

4.5 *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011)

4.5.1 Synopsis

In Week 4, I introduced *No Bears*, written by Meg McKinlay and illustrated by Leila Rudge. The book is replete with metafictive devices. The title is the first instance of irony, which appears repeatedly throughout the text. The narrator is Ruby, who lets us know that this is a book because it has words everywhere like 'once upon a time' (p. 1). However, since Ruby is in charge of the book (or so she thinks), there will be no bears in the books because too many books contain bears. 'I'm tired of bears. Every time you read a book it's just BEARS BEARS—horrible furry bears slurping honey in grotty little caves' (p. 3). So, the scene is set for a parade of metafictive devices to challenge and entice the reader to question who is telling the story and how many storylines are there?

Metafictive devices in picturebooks draw the reader's attention to how the story is being told and how the narrative is structured, which is very evident in this complex tale. *No Bears* is an excellent example of this. Although the story is narrated by Ruby, there are other stories happening around the perimeter of the main text, and one of the lead characters is a bear! The book is indeed a parody because many characters from other children's tales are present—Little Red Riding Hood, the Owl

and the Pussycat, the Three Pigs, Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel and many others (intertextuality). Various stories weave in and out of the core as characters engage with each other in this ironic romp through the pages. After many adventures, the story concludes with: 'Happily ever after in The END' (p. 23) and Ruby is content because no bears were present in the story.

4.5.2 Metafictive Devices

While Sipe and McGuire (2008) identified six categories of metafictive devices (see section 2.2.1), Pantaleo (2014) further expands the list to 18 (see Table 2.2). All 18 of these devices are present in *No Bears*(McKinlay, 2011). Intextuality is very strongly represented with the multiple characters listed above. They all seem to tumble about in the story, creating complexity, parody and humour within the text. The subversion of the traditional is apparent, as demonstrated by the mocking voice that pervades the text. The storyline is constantly disrupted by the bear, monsters and a fairy that inhabit the perimeter of the page. The blurring of boundaries between the real world and the world of the text adds further complexity to the plot that is non-linear. This pastiche of metafictive devices is further enhanced by the playful arrangement of the text, font and illustrations. Self-referentiality adds another layer of complexity to the story, with the reader constantly being drawn into the story and challenged by the characters that break in and out of boundaries.

No Bears is an excellent vehicle for the development of critical literacy because the readers are constantly challenged in their reading of the text. Janks (2014) stated that critical practices in literacy can be viewed as social practices through which the reader examines the role of the text. In the case of *No Bears*, all previous perceptions of how a story is told are up-ended in the most engaging way by enlisting a wide range of metafictive devices to cajole and challenge the reader.

Figure 4.4

Metafictive Devices

No Bears contains all of the metafictive devices previously examined. Pantaleo (2014) asserted that metafiction draws the reader into the text to wonder at its construction and execution (self referentiality). This page demonstrates intertextuality , for example Rapunzel. Irony is present as the bear sits outside the frame of the narrative and manipulates a creature inside the narrative. Typographic manipulation is present as is the voice of the narrator. There are disruptions in the flow of the narrative and a pastiche of illustrative styles. (Pantaleo, 2014)
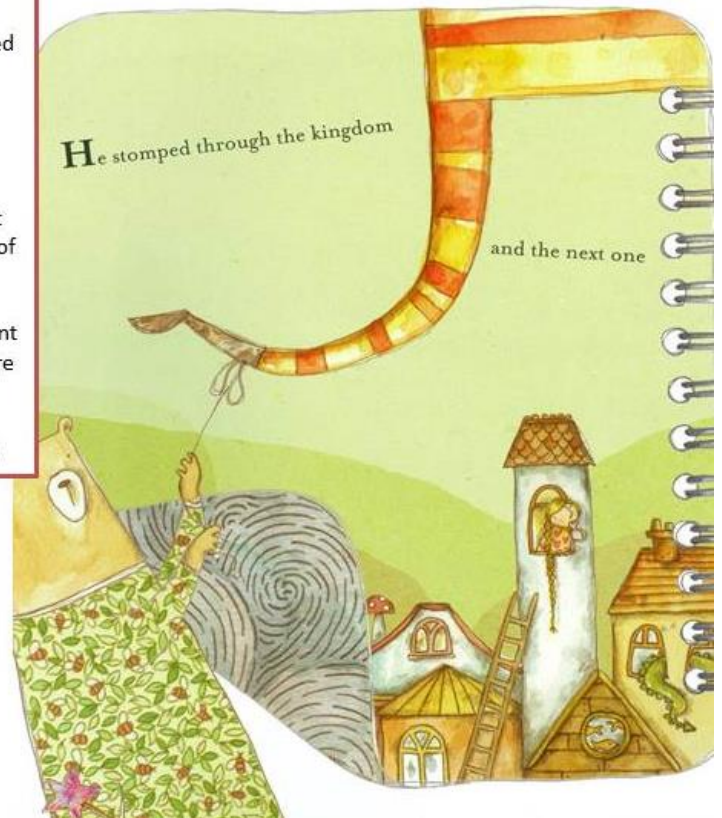
Janks (2014) focused on five practices in understanding texts. These include the ability of the reader to make connections with their world and thereby develop the ability to examine the choices that people make and identify their effect on society. These skills, which can have implications for decisions in later life, can still be developed in children's literature, even in a riotous parody such as *No Bears*. Readers need to learn to interrogate a text and understand the power that the author wields in trying to influence their point of view through metafictive devices. Even if the narrative appears light-hearted—as is the case with *No Bears*—the skills of understanding and interrogation can be developed and applied to other life situations.

4.5.3 Why This Text?

The complexities of *No Bears* make it an excellent vehicle to begin developing a critical stance, because it contains all the metafictive devices described by Pantaleo (2014) . As Paugh et al. (2014) argued, students need to understand how texts work if they are to become critically literate. This was one of the reasons why I

selected this book, which contains the six metafictive devices identified by Sipe and McGuire (2008) and further elaborated by Pantaleo (2014).

The prolific use of intertextuality allows the reader to develop the metalanguage to express their understanding of the narrative. This is because many of the texts embedded in the story would be known to children. This knowledge of different texts and the recognition that the author has embedded many texts into *No Bears*, then poses the question: Why? The students' analysis of this question yielded varied answers, offering the opportunity for a more critical view of the text and not just one of acceptance.

No Bears is a high-quality picturebook. The author has won the CBCA Notable Picturebook of the Year (2018), the Prime Minister's Literary Award (2016), the Queensland Literary Award (2015), the Aurealis Award (2015) and many others. By now, the Book Detectives were gathering momentum and because this text offered many opportunities for discovering intertextuality (the Detectives' favourite device), this text was very popular. They were also aware of the irony and I explained that this was another device that authors use—in this case, to add humour to the story.

4.5.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 4: *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011)

The shift from last week has gained momentum with the class eager to begin reading and as they read, I observed them reading the pictures as well as the words. I had told them about the end papers, the cover and how they could work out if the author and illustrator were the same person or not. I discussed the blurb on the back or inside cover, the publisher and information about the author and if the book had won any awards. I was observing the students as they waited for all the books to be distributed, discussing the cover, end papers and other elements to see if there were any clues about the content of the story. I also noticed that when they completed reading, they would go back to these elements of the text to check for additional information or confirm what they thought. This is a very impressive shift in their book handling skills

There was a stillness and silence in the room as they read, which demonstrated their absorption in the text. After they had completed reading the first time, I was going to speak to the class, however, I noticed they were

going back and re-reading and checking information in the text, so I decided to wait. I only interrupted when they had had a chance to interact with each other. They had found many examples of intertextuality without any instruction from me and picked up the irony of the title as the text is full of bears. One student decided that he was a true detective! I decided that they were all Book Detectives. I found that this week I had minimal intervention compared to previous weeks as the students were taking over the running of the sessions, from distributing resources, reading independently, beginning their own table discussions and noting any interesting ideas down on paper.

4.6 *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1989)

4.6.1 Synopsis

In Week 5, I introduced *The Tunnel*, written and illustrated by Anthony Browne. This text again focuses on family relationships; a mystical event occurs during the narrative that has a similar structure to that of *Gorilla*. The story unfolds around a brother and sister's relationship that does not appear very strong because they have very different interests. The girl likes reading, the boy playing soccer. These different interests are introduced to the reader in the end papers. In the beginning, a book and a soccer ball are on separate pages; at the end they are together on one page, indicating a shift in the sibling relationship. It is only on the final page that we learn the siblings' names, Rose and Jack. The siblings are sent outside to play together by their mother. Reluctantly, they go to a disused allotment and follow their own pursuits. The brother notices a tunnel and tries to entice his sister to crawl through it with him. After a time, the brother does not return and his sister becomes increasingly worried. Finally, she crawls through the dark tunnel, worried that something has happened to her brother: 'She waited and waited, but he did not come. She was close to tears. What could she do? She had to follow him into the tunnel' (p. 11). When the sister reaches the end of the tunnel, she runs through a forest where the trees look like characters from a book until she sees her brother, frozen like a statue, in a field (where all the trees have been cut down). The sister runs up to her brother and hugs him. In a series of four images, the brother slowly returns to normal and he gives his sister a hug.

4.6.2 Metafictive Devices

The siblings return home together and smile at each other. It is here that we learn their names. Browne has employed a range of metafictive devices to tell this story of family redemption. The presence of intertextuality is present in the sister's room with references to *Little Red Riding Hood*. As the sister runs through the forest, there are storybook characters carved in the tree trunks—a bear, a wolf, a gorilla, a pig and various other creatures. These images reveal a text rich in images that need deciphering, with the reader wondering what they mean. Janks (2010) stated that texts position the reader to receive a message and the more the reader engages, the greater the positioning by the author. Students need to realise that the author has this skill, and they need to decide whether to accept or reject the message being conveyed.

Complex visual images like those of *The Tunnel* present the reader with different pathways and possibilities about meaning. However, students need to be taught how to read not only the words but the images; they also need to be encouraged to wonder why they are in the text and what information or point of view they represent. Nodelman (1988) added that readers need to understand not only words and pictures but what happens when they converge. The images and words either complement each other or are disparate. Thus, the complexity of picturebooks containing metafictive devices challenges the reader to fully engage in the text and take a position regarding the message being conveyed. Words and pictures in a text complement each other and offer a richness of meaning that has to be decoded (Nodelman, 1988). The illustrations in these texts have an 'ironic relationship to each other: The words tell us what the pictures do not show and the pictures tell us what the words do not tell' (Nodelman, 1988, p. 222). This then offers the educator a unique opportunity to teach students the skills of being critically literate when presented with a text such as *The Tunnel*. What symbolism is represented by the brother turning to stone and the sister's love returning him to him his former state? This opportunity for shared classroom discussion could unearth complex or literal meanings, depending on the students' ability to decode the intersection of words and pictures. The excerpt shown in Figure 4.5 had a profound effect on the Book Detectives and was the impetus for a lengthy discussion after which they decided that love can be shown in many different ways. This discussion revealed a growing sophistication in their responses that was not obvious in Week 1.

Figure 4.5

Metafictive Devices, Semiotics, Self-Referentiality

She threw her arms around the cold hard form, and wept. Very slowly, the figure began to change colour, becoming softer and warmer.

Then, little by little, it began to move. Her brother was there. "Rose! I knew you'd come," he said. They ran back, through the forest, through the wood, into the tunnel, and out again. Together.

This image challenges the reader to interpret the seemingly fantastical ability of a child to be turned to stone and then return to normal. The blurring of boundaries in picturebooks containing metafictive devices changes the distance between the author and reader (Sipe &Mcguire, 2008) .

These pages also demonstrate the use of semiotics where the images evoke a wondering and questioning. Self referentiality will draw the reader into this complex situation as the reader may also have at times had conflict with their own siblings. Nikolajeva (2010) stated that the reader needs to decode the narrative and engage in predicting the outcome.

4.6.3 Why This Text?

The qualities discussed above point to this being an excellent picturebook to share with students. Its complexity of images and symbolism allow the reader to share interpretations and actively and jointly decipher the meaning embodied in the text and illustrations (Curwen et al., 2019). The symbolic illustration depicted in Figure 4.5 is open-ended; there is no right or wrong answer. Therefore, it offers the reader a unique opportunity to construct a personal interpretation of the text. This symbolic illustration would be an excellent example for developing critical literacy because in a whole-class discussion, students suggest or insinuate with prompting a deeper response to what is happening in the series of frames. Nodelman and Reimer (2003) asserted that symbolism is a powerful device used in picturebooks. It allows the reader to explore more philosophical and critical meanings in the text. The demonstration of sibling love was a key message for the students since it could be an important factor in their own lives.

4.6.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 5: *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1989)

It is amazing the excitement that a picturebook can create in a classroom. The whole class appear to be focused and engaged—even the two students who were deemed as strugglers and who were not fully engaged at the beginning of these sessions. As I look around the room, every student is fully engaged in their reading of the words and pictures in the text. When they had

completed the first reading, they went back to the beginning and started discussing the text with their table members. The comparison to Week 1 is striking. The prompt cards lie abandoned in the folders; however, I did notice a few students referring to them before we began our whole-class sharing. I was very pleased with their responses when I asked about the significance of the end papers. They expressed that the end papers showed a shift in the sibling's relationship. We discussed the page where the brother is turned to stone and by the sister hugging him, he returned to normal. One student commented that it demonstrated the power of love and that was what saved the brother…no literal response here!

4.7 *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (Thompson, 2008)

4.7.1 Synopsis

In Week 6, I introduced *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness*, written and illustrated by Colin Thompson. This picturebook contains a range of metafictive devices to create a narrative that begins with a feeling of emptiness and despondency and concludes with joy and a celebration of life, with all the possibilities it can offer (hence the title). The opening double-spread evokes a feeling of sadness and loss, with the illustration of a grandmother in the top left-hand corner, then a wide empty space with a kite in the bottom right-hand corner. The opening lines set the initial mood of the text: 'George lived alone with his grandmother and an empty place where his mother and father should have been' (p. 1). In the following page, George (a small boy) is on his way home from school and visits the dog pound: 'The last cage was where the dogs no one wanted went for a final week before their journey to heaven' (p. 2). We view the back of George as he visits this section of the pound. The illustrations are dark and sombre as George sees a sad dog in the last cage that seems to reflect himself: 'The dog like George was scruffy and sad' (p. 3). George approaches the lady in the office and wishes to adopt the dog. He is told that it is the dog's last day. He is given one hour to ask his parents whether he can take the dog. George rushes home to ask his grandmother and she agrees. The dog (Jeremy) cannot believe his luck because he thought he was going on his last walk. George carries Jeremy home—Jeremy only has three legs—but his (and George's) life is about to change: 'Jeremy thought he had gone through the green door after all and died and gone to heaven' (p. 19).

4.7.2 Metafictive Devices

George and his grandmother decide to make Jeremy a leg. They go through quite a few models and have different legs for different occasions. The final double-spread is in stark contrast to the first; it is full of colour and life. The grandmother is balancing on a large ball of yarn while balancing a cup and saucer on a stick attached to her nose—tools the author has used to communicate the emotions in this text (Bull & Anstey, 2019). George is on stilts as Jeremy spins on his wheel leg on the clothesline: 'The empty place inside George didn't seem so empty any more. And the three of them lived happily ever after for a very long time' (p. 27).

One of the most powerful metafictive devices in this narrative is the use of the gap. The space that is created between the words and pictures promotes agency in the student as they fill the gap with content that is appropriate in their eyes; shared in the Reader's Circle, this constructs and enriches the body of knowledge in the class. Since words and pictures are two different modes of communication, the skills of critical literate are essential (Nodelman, 1988). With these two modes of expression, students also need to understand the relationship between these two modes. To fill the gap, students need the ability to not only read the words but also to read the pictures.

Figure 4.6

Metafictive Devices, Self-Referentiality and the Blurring of Boundaries
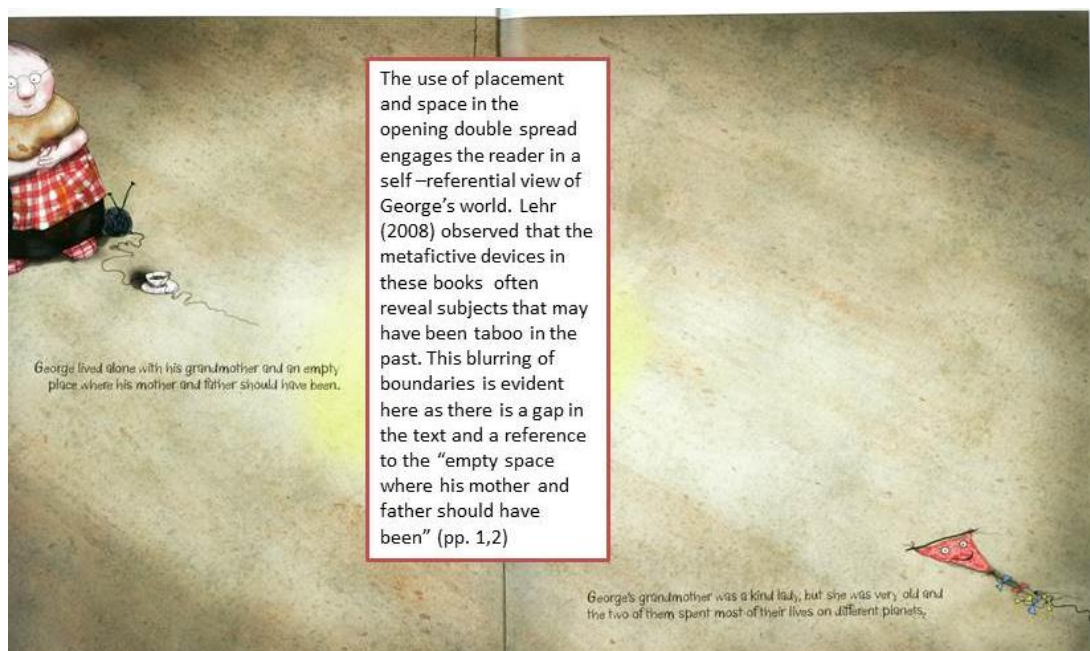
This engagement with the gap embraces self-referentiality because students cannot passively accept either one mode of communication or the other; instead, they are drawn into the text as an entity in itself, and not an object (Sipe & Pantaleo, 2008). This text would have many aspects that students could relate to while at the same time challenging them to engage in a story that begins in a rather gloomy fashion but changes into a celebration of love and what it is to be a family. This text presents a different perspective of what a happy family entails.

Picturebooks as multimodal texts build a relationship between the reader and the various characters within that book (Serafini, 2009). Therefore, students need the skills to decipher this communication and its implications in telling the story. The illustrations in *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (Thompson, 2008) offer students the opportunity to understand, for example, the positioning of George in the text. In the beginning he is represented by a kite; we then view his back in six pages (with half of his face visible as he asks his grandmother whether he can have the dog) and it is not until George is given permission to adopt Jeremy that we see his face for the first time. Thompson is using this positioning to convey a feeling of being lonely. Students need to understand what this positioning means and how it conveys George's feelings and attitude towards life.

4.7.3 Why This Text?

In choosing this text, I considered the views of Luke (2012) on critical literacy. The reader needs to understand why the author has constructed the text in a certain style and what beliefs are being presented to the reader. This awareness of self-referentiality draws the reader into the text—as in *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness*—through situations that engage the reader in an active manner. The design, layout and message of the book were factors that influenced my choice. Callow (2013) drew attention to the layout of the images and text, highlighting salience, placement and framing—elements that are very effectively used by Thompson. The layout of the opening page strongly influenced the choice of this book because it immediately evokes the mood of the narrative. Learning how to express their understanding of a text also gives the students a voice to express their understanding of family. The metafictive devices of self-referentiality, the gap between the picture and the words and the clever placement and arrangement of objects within a space allow the student to explore what is a family and what factors can influence happiness. By presenting an alternative to the standard family composition of

mother, father and two children, the text offers all students the opportunity to find a relatable family group. This is particularly important in the context of today's evolving definition of what constitutes a family. The Book Detectives were quick to realise that the gap in the family's life had been filled by their kindness to a small three-legged dog. This bought into play self-referentiality, which for this study was called self-connection. The gaps in the story were also powerful because the boy's parents were only mentioned in the first double-spread, in terms of their absence.

4.7.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 6: *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (Thompson, 2008)

The books were distributed as usual and I overheard two students discussing end papers. They all read quietly once again and after the first reading were asking each other questions about the text. The mood in the room was quite subdued, which reflects the content of the text. They later shared how sad they felt when reading the book but that the situation changed for the better. We were able to discuss how Thompson uses space and place to create various feelings within the book. During this study I have attempted to talk about the author and the author's intent so that the students can identify that the author is a person with their own ideas and beliefs. This is adding to our discussions as the author now has an identity and is present within the book. The development of the metalanguage to express their ideas about the various texts is a powerful skill that the students have acquired.

4.8 *The Singing Hat* (T. Riddle, 2000)

4.8.1 Synopsis

In Week 7, I introduced *The Singing Hat*, written and illustrated by Tohby Riddle. This is an intriguing text that offers an oblique view of an unusual situation. The message of this book, which is conveyed in words and pictures, requires active participation by the reader. Colin Jenkins (who is always referred to by both names throughout the text) is the protagonist of the story. He leads a seemingly quiet life with his daughter. One day, when Colin Jenkins was taking a nap under a tree in his lunch break, a bird built a nest on his head. Colin Jenkins was unaware of this development until he looked in the mirror at home. His daughter urged him to leave the bird where it was: 'Colin Jenkins decided—right there and then—that it was not wise to interfere with nature' (p. 7). So begins an unusual set of events. The bird

eventually hatches the egg, which causes issues at work. Colin Jenkins loses his job and as a consequence, also loses his home because he cannot pay the rent. When on the train, Colin Jenkins is greeted by a fellow traveller who tells him that the bird on his head is very rare. It is at that moment that the birds took off and left the nest. The man instructed Colin Jenkins to keep the nest, which he did. 'Colin Jenkins never took another job like the one he had, but he always found work. And although he never saw either bird again, from time to time he would find the most beautiful and improbable things… in the nest he had placed on the table by the window in his room' (p. 28).

4.8.2 Metafictive Devices

T. Riddle (2000) uses an unusual illustrative technique of line drawing, both coloured and black and white, photographic collage and silhouette. This rich pastiche of illustrative styles adds to the quizzical nature of the words (Sipe & McGuire, 2008). T. Riddle's phrases are in a style that creates an intimacy with the reader: 'He wasn't welcome where once he was… meetings at work took on a different character' (p. 10–11). The reader is drawn closer to Colin Jenkins and his dilemmas: 'Life was definitely becoming less usual, Colin Jenkins thought to himself at the end of each day' (p. 13).

Figure 4.7

Metafictive Devices
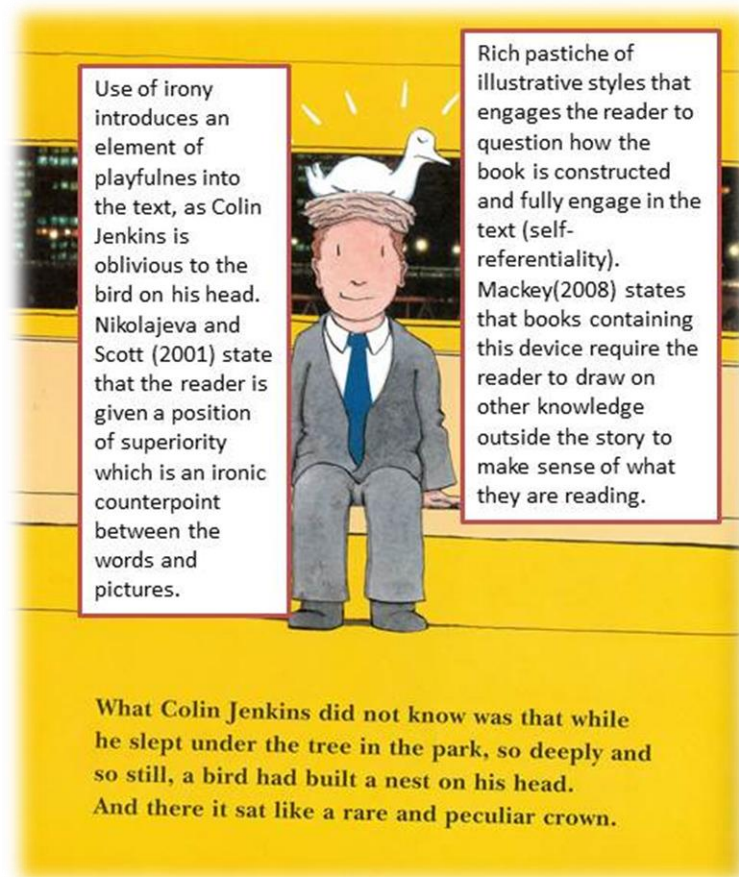
This text offers opportunities for the reader to initially puzzle over the meaning of the narrative and then—with the influence of the metafictive devices, especially the self-referentiality—wonder at the message and the way it was conveyed. Questions are raised in the mind of the reader about why the book is constructed in this particular illustrative and linguistic style. Anstey and Bull (2019) pointed to the richness of classroom discussion that could emanate from a book such as this. The effectiveness of such discussion is that all students benefit from hearing other students' ideas and together, a joint construction of meaning develops. Students benefit from hearing how others formulate their ideas and what impact the text had on them. This also highlights the importance of developing a common metalanguage to give students the ability to engage with texts in a critical way (NLG, 1996).

Evans (2009) noted that although picturebooks have fewer words and contain illustrations, they are actually complex multimodal texts. This is evident in *The*

Singing Hat, which is very demanding of the reader. Evans continued that reading a book by yourself is not enough; it is the rich classroom discussions that create the meaning, allowing students to build a classroom culture that values the ideas and opinions of all members of the group.

4.8.3 Why This Text?

I chose this book because, like all picturebooks containing metafictive devices, it focuses on plot, theme and character. It also contains a range of devices to convey the story, offering the reader an experience that is both enjoyable and thought-provoking by leaving meanings unexplained and multiple pathways or illustrative styles peppered throughout the text (Anstey & Bull, 2009). *The Singing Hat* raises questions of environmental responsibility and living a life that is true to oneself. The focus on the core values of what it is to be happy, accepted and valued are explored in this text. When students engage with the metafictive devices in picturebooks, they engage 'physically, intellectually and emotionally. The action of engagement is multisensory and multimodal' (Styles & Noble, p. 131). This text also blurs the boundary between author and reader, inviting the reader to become involved, almost in a conspiratorial way.

While this text could be viewed as challenging for 8-year-old students, I was interested to gauge their progress in fully engaging with the metafictive devices in this multimodal narrative because of the limited time frame of the study (only 10 weeks with the students). This text also offered the students a valuable lens on a society overwhelmed by consumerism, in which values really matter—a view that students could identify with (Vasquez, 2017). Indeed, the students did articulate the values of society and that people could be judged by their appearance. They could also identify the environmental focus of the text.

4.8.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 7: *The Singing Hat* (T. Riddle, 2000)

The room was very quiet when the students were reading as this text has more words than our previous texts. We began to unpack the meaning of the text after we had discussed a few challenging words. One student began by commenting on Colin Jenkins caring for the rare birds even though it eventually cost him his job and his home. This prompted a discussion about the environment and how they admired the main character because he did not think about himself. One student commented that you should not judge people

by how they look. The teacher again commented on the change in the students reading habits. They not only read the book but explored and interrogated the whole text.

4.9 *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010)

4.9.1 Synopsis

In Week 8, I introduced *The Heart and the Bottle*, written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers. Jeffers has created a thought-provoking and original picturebook that deals with the sudden absence of a father (or grandfather) from a young girl's life and how she deals with the grief that accompanies such a loss. This lavishly illustrated picturebook begins happily with a young girl and her father (or grandfather) walking with her outdoors and observing the world and inside sharing books and ideas about many topics such as the Solar System. Wonder is introduced, with the young girl revelling in the world around her. One day, she finds her father's (or grandfather's) chair empty; to cope with this reality she places her heart in a bottle to keep it safe. The girl loses interest in the world and finds it awkward carrying her heart around her neck in a bottle. At the beach, the girl meets a younger girl who is still curious about her world. The girl does not know how to answer the younger girl's questions, so she decides to take her heart out of the bottle, to restore her former self. However, she cannot work out how to do this. She tries many tactics, such as using a saw or a hammer. However, it is the younger girl who simply puts her hand in the bottle and removes the heart. So, the heart is put back where it belongs and the girl begins to heal. She regains her thirst for knowledge, sitting in the previously empty chair: 'And the chair wasn't so empty anymore. But the bottle was' (pp. 30–31).

4.9.2 Metafictive Devices

This text has a variety of illustrative styles, such as a simple double page spread, multiple fames and a complex collection of thought bubbles with images embedded in them. The illustrations of the girls are stylised in a simple sparse image. Illustrations with varied techniques, such as this text (especially the pages with detailed illustrations), often have a key detail to attract the reader's eye and lead the reader to fill in the gaps in the text (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006).

Goodwin (2009) stated that picturebooks can develop empathy in readers when the characters experience difficult situations (as in *The Heart and the Bottle*).

The reader engaging with this text will need the ability to go beyond the literal to discover the message that the text carries. While it should never be forgotten that these picturebooks are written for pleasure, they do offer excellent opportunities for the development of a critical stance in uncovering their meaning. The recognition of the metafictive devices and the development of a metalanguage by the reader will assist in this development.

Framing is used in a variety of ways in this text, drawing the eye of the reader to discover important information and provoke a feeling of wonder at the discoveries the girl has made. When she is alone and grappling with a broken heart, the page border is the frame, which conveys a feeling of being alone and lost. Smith (2009) observed that writers use the construction of a text to often disrupt the narrative and change what the reader was expecting. This text varies the use of framing to amplify the emotions of the story.

Figure 4.8

Metafictive Devices, Irony, Self-Referentiality

As the words do not mirror the images Nodelman(1988) referred to this as an ironic relationship between words and pictures.

The illustrations on this page are very stylised and pared back depicting the starkness of the girls emotions. The chair in her thoughts is empty of her loved one. The reader needs to be able to interpret the images as the text gives us other details. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) stated that we need to "read between the lines" (p. 14).

She was no longer filled with all the curiosities of the world and didn't take much notice of anything...

Self referentiality is present as the reader may develop a sense of empathy for the nameless girl (which heightens her sense of isolation), as the reader needs to decipher the construction of the text and refer the chair back to happier times for the girl when it was occupied (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

Because picturebooks carry the bulk of their message in pictures, Jeffers (2010) has incorporated many metafictive elements into this medium. There are also gaps and silences within the text that provoke and raise questions as to absence of the male figure within the text. The illustrations dominate the text, with varying arrangements and points of salience on the page. Painter et al. (2010) noted that children need to develop their literacy skills with a semiotic object that is not the voice of an adult. Thus, the images are very important in establishing that relationship between the reader and the text. The images can develop the tone of the text (Painter et al., 2010); Jeffers has managed to sensitively represent a serious topic through an illustrative style that is stylised, and not realistic. The changing of the focalisation of the images within the text moves the story along and draws the reader's attention to important information that the text is conveying (Painter et al.,

2010). The girl is depicted as a small figure against a larger landscape, which emphasises her loneliness and self-isolation. This contrasts with the beginning of the text, which is filled with excitement and wonder.

4.9.3 Why This Text?

Picturebooks often carry a message relating to social and personal issues as pointed out by Painter et al. (2013). This is one of the reasons why I chose this text for the study. While the theme of the narrative revolves around loss and grief, it is told in a manner that is not confronting; rather, a whimsical approach is adopted through the analogy of the girl hiding her heart in a bottle to keep it safe from any further pain. The Book Detectives were very quick to realise the message of this text and as excerpts in later chapters illustrate, they were able to see the devices that Jeffers used to discuss the loss of a loved one and how the girl had to protect her broken heart. This imagery was freely discussed without any embarrassment since the students were now comfortable delving into the deeper meaning of a text with a critical view of the meaning.

This text draws heavily on cultural codes that we take for granted (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). The symbol of the heart is pivotal in this text; it conveys the message of love and happiness—or the opposite, if the heart is metaphorically broken. This metafictive device of using symbols and semiotics conveys a powerful message that could be deemed as challenging for children. However, Jeffers skilfully creates an illusion that gives the reader the opportunity to read deeply into the narrative and develop a critical stance. This supports the aim of this study and results in the reader feeling empathy for the protagonist of the story. Jeffers has won many literary awards including the Bisto Book of the Year, a New York Emmy Award, an Irish Book Award, the Orbil Prize and a CBI Book Award.

4.9.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 8: *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010)

I was interested to see if the students would continue in the same fashion as last term as it has been four weeks since I worked with them and I have quite a challenging book for them to read. I noticed some puzzled faces when they had completed their reading, so they began looking back through the text to clarify what was puzzling them—the Book Detectives in action!

The whole-class discussion began at a steady pace with some quite literal ideas being expressed, but the power of the group emerged with some

children's comments stimulating others and giving them the confidence to say
something that appeared to be different. Some of the comments were very
moving. One student stated that the girl had to put her heart in a bottle to
protect it because it had broken because someone she loved had died. The
students are becoming quite at ease with books that slowly reveal themselves.

4.10 *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000)

4.10.1 Synopsis

In Week 9, I introduced *The Lost Thing*, written and illustrated by Shaun Tan. This text challenges the reader with a multilayered picturebook that offers the opportunity to explore social issues. The text focuses on a nameless boy who finds a large red mechanical 'Thing' that appears to be lost at the beach. The boy attempts to find the owner and first consults a knowledgeable friend but because he receives no clear answer, he takes the Thing home. After viewing information on the television about a department of Lost and Found, the boy and the Thing set out the next day to find out whether they can locate where the Thing belongs. After a visit to a bleak office block, the boy is warned by another Thing not to leave it there; the boy is given a card with an arrow. Once outside, the Thing follows the arrow until they come to a large metal door. The boy presses the button and as the door slides open, a wonderland inhabited by Things is revealed. The boy sadly waves goodbye to the Thing and leaves. The next scene shows the boy grown up; he has become one of the anonymous inhabitants of an industrialised homogenous world. He states that he does not notice Things these days.

4.10.2 Metafictive Devices

This picturebook contains many metafictive devices, including the blurring of boundaries between the narrator and the reader with the narrator making comments in the text that almost seem as an aside, addressing the reader: 'So you want to hear a story'? (p. 1) and 'So I'll tell you about the time I found that lost thing' (p. 1). A relationship is immediately offered to the reader to engage in a story being told to only them, thus breaking down that hierarchical boundary between the author and reader (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

Intertextuality is introduced in multiple ways, with the background of the pages being from Tan's father's technical drawings, the variety of signs, to references to the works of Jeffery Smart. The illustrations in this text could be

described as extravagant in their detail and complexity and add to the complexity of meaning and pathways throughout the narrative.

Playfulness is introduced to the narrative when The Lost Thing (2000) finds where it belongs—a happy colourful and seemingly carefree world, unlike the one inhabited by humans. Self-referentiality is very evident in this text as the reader is drawn into the text and wonders about the construction and message being conveyed. The metafictive view of text as a text is apparent because of the complexity of images and the almost melancholy narration of the events by an unnamed narrator (Benton, 2002).

The Lost Thing is a highly complex picturebook saturated with meaning. Nodelman (1988) stated that picturebooks are dense with meaning and require skill and knowledge to unlock the message. This text requires an understanding of the relationship between the words and pictures and is a composite of various devices; this may be considered paradoxical because picturebooks are considered texts for children yet they require many complex skills to read, view and understand the embedded message. While this narrative is difficult, it also indulges in playfulness of illustration and text (Pantaleo, 2014; Sipe & McGuire, 2008). While the narrator faces the conundrum of finding the Thing a home, there is levity in the way it follows the narrator around and seems content to be lost. However, when the Thing has finally found the place where it belongs, this place is crowded with other unusual Things that also do not seem to belong anywhere. The narrator at times appears detached from the message of the text and progressively slips into the homogenous assembly line that is the city's culture.

Tan (2000) is offering the reader a chance to view society with a critical yet non-judgemental eye, which gives the reader an opportunity to form their own view on society (Paugh et al., 2014). The engagement with the text is subtle because the one person who notices the large red Thing and seeks to find where it belongs quietly slips into uniformity of the industrialised world in which he lives: 'I still think about that lost thing from time to time. Especially when I see something out of the corner of my eye that doesn't quite fit' (p. 29). The last page with text has a disquieting comment: 'Maybe there aren't many lost things anymore. Or maybe I've just stopped noticing them' (p. 30).

Figure 4.9

Metafictive Devices, Intertextuality, Blurring of Boundaries, Self-Referentiality, Typographical Arrangement

Intertextuality enriches this text with the layering of images on a complex background. Barthes (1977) recognised that no text is original but that texts are constructed from many other sources. The background in this text are technical drawings from tan's father, who was an architect.

The reader is directly addressed by the narrator blurring the boundaries between the reader and author. The author no longer has a hierarchical position in the reading process, as the reader receives an invitation to be part of the narrative (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

So you want to hear a sto...

Well, I used to know a whole lot of pretty interesting ones. Some of them so funny you'd laugh yourself unconscious, others so terrible you'd never want to repeat them.

But I can't remember any of those.

So I'll just tell you about the time I found that lost thing.

Tan's use of framing offers the reader multiple perspectives on the one page. Firstly we have the voice of the narrator. The reader is also given information about the setting of the narrative in a highly industrialised world. Scott (2010) refers to this style of framing as structural which is mirrored in the background papers. This evokes the playful devices used in picturebooks and also the self referential nature of the text as the reader is drawn into the structure of the text (Lewis, 2001).

This narrative can be reviewed many times and different messages and details are absorbed by the reader. The rich layering of illustrations and the variety of positioning on the page engages the reader and subtly reinforces the message. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) asserted that multiliteracies offer a broader perspective than words alone. They continued that different modes of communication enrich the experience of attempting new practices of engagement with what it means to be critically literate. The place where the lost Thing finds a home has a double page spread with a thick black border, which is unlike any other page. This signals that the page is unique in its colouring, positioning of creatures and movement, setting it apart from the industrialised tight framing of most of the remaining pages. The contrast is obvious between individual freedom to be who you are and the regimentation of an industrialised society.

4.10.3 Why This Text?

I chose this highly complex text because I felt that the message of noticing and caring for individuals and being different was positive, and worth sharing with

the Year 3 students in this study. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) stated that in regards to the development critical literacy, students need to cultivate an understanding of the complex meanings of systems that make up a culture and to explore the semiotics that are signposted every day in our world. Tan (2000) uses a myriad of signs and symbols to expose the reader to this language that underpins our way of living but is not always overtly visible. Books such as *The Lost Thing* allow students to explore meanings and develop a critical stance as they attempt to navigate a complex text. Self-referentiality is used to develop the intricate layering in the illustrations as the reader needs to try to understand how the text was constructed and the reasons for the complexity of the illustrations and varied use of framing and placement.

The social context of *The Lost Thing* encourages the students to express their evolving worldview and values that they identify as important in their lives. This critical view and the ability to develop a critically literate voice is essential in today's children living in a multimodal world (Pantaleo, 2017). The Book Detectives recognised the semiotics, signs and symbols in this text; I would have liked to review this text again, but unfortunately our time together was drawing to an end. Mills (2011) asserted that multimodal texts open up an important portal into meaning-making and the acquisition of a metalanguage; such a language is a tool to express a new understanding and a more critical view of a text. Tan is an award-winning author and this text won the CBCA Picturebook of the Year. The book also won an Academy Award for Animation, and L. Ron Hubbard Award, a Ditmar Award and was a Boston Globe Winner.

4.10.4 Reflections From the Classroom: Field Notes

Week 9: *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000)

The Book Detectives discussed intertextuality, irony, the use of fonts, placement and signs and symbols and why these devices worked. The students were very interested in the end papers in this text and this exploration of the peritext has become a natural way for them to begin reading a text. They read quietly and were absorbed in the book as it is a complicated text in terms of layout, illustrations and meaning. Then they began to share that no matter what you look like, everyone should have a home and a place where they belong. They were intrigued by Tan's use of his father's architectural drawings as a background on each page, the use of framing was also discussed and the effect this had on the telling of the story. Without

instruction, many of the students began re-reading the book after our
discussion and the rest followed.

4.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse the metafictive devices in the picturebooks used in this study and present the findings from the classroom in the form of sequential field notes. A fuller version of these field notes can be found in Appendix B. The response from the classroom confirmed the assertion that quality children's literature—and in this case, picturebooks containing metafictive devices—is an essential component of a successful literacy program, and indeed, it is mandated in the Australian Curriculum: English. While it should always be acknowledged that these texts are written for the pleasure of the reader, to fully receive the intended message, a critical stance is essential. These often complex texts, specifically the ones discussed in this chapter, offer a wonderful opportunity to educators to immerse students in quality literature, enjoyment of the narrative and exploration of the illustrations while discussing the devices used by authors to convey their messages. Pantaleo (2014) stated that such texts gave students a medium through which to become more involved in exploring the text and cultivating the role of co-author by eliciting meaning from the text and filling in the gaps, which are often a feature of these texts.

> *As I looked around the room, ALL the students were actively reading the*
> *words and pictures; when they had finished reading, they went back and re-*
> *read and started discussing the book with other students. The excitement in*
> *the room was palpable as they made more and more discoveries in the*
> *illustrations, including the end papers. I was very pleased when I asked about*
> *the meaning of the pages where the sister hugs the brother who has turned to*
> *stone and he gradually returns to normal. A student replied that 'the power of*
> *love had saved him'.* (Journal Entry, Week 5, 15.3.19)

This adoption of a more critical stance, as stated by Luke and Woods (2009), gives students the opportunity to connect their literacy skills to their own lives. In today's uncertain times, the skill of being able to extract accurate information from a text and decide whether the writer's view is in line with a student's developing personal schema is imperative (Facer, 2019). In relation to reading and viewing, these skills can be developed and applied to the engagement with picturebooks

containing metafictive devices; such books can contain pertinent messages about society and its values that are relevant to the students. Pantaleo (2014) pointed out that just because students live in a multimodal world does not necessarily mean that they are visually literate. These picturebooks offer that opportunity through the devices used by the authors to convey their message and the use of semiotics that give clues to unlock the deeper content of the text (Goldstone, 2004). In particular, the device of intertextuality had a powerful influence of the Year 3 students, who became the Book Detectives. Once this device had been pointed out to the students and the clues it gave about the author's intended message, they pursued this device through every text they read. This impetus led to them understanding the other devices embedded in these texts as they worked together to uncover a message. Arizpe and Styles (2003) asserted that developing a metalanguage in students gave them the ability to express a greater appreciation of multimodal texts. Many of the selected texts also offered students the opportunity to view issues present in their world and to begin to develop a personal stance in relation to their emerging personal social values. A model for an empathic and compassionate view of life is often reflected in literature (Barton & Garvis, 2019). Many of the picturebooks in this study have such attributes and were selected for that reason. The examples used in this chapter, which are analysed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7, highlight the power of metafictive devices as a key to open the author's message.

By exploring the content and metafictive devices in the picturebooks in this study, it is evident that they offer a wonderful opportunity for students to explore the texts. Importantly, they also give students the opportunity to acquire a metalanguage, express their findings to peers, construct a shared understanding of the texts and shape their personal stance in relation to the text. This is further demonstrated in Figure 4.10.

Figure 4.10

Metafictive Devices Intertextuality

Riley

Intertextuality is another layer in this complex text. Lewis (2001) commented on the hybridization of picturebooks containing metafictive devices. He stated that nothing is sacred in these texts as is demonstrated by the graffiti on the famous art works. This insertion of these works adds to the mocking tone of the text which focuses on human excess as demonstrated by humans focus on always having the newest and the best of everything.

Chapter 5: Data Findings and Discussion: The Year 3 Book Detectives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study, including those from the classroom observations, reflection notes and interview. The perspective of the Year 3 Books Detectives is offered to reinforce the aim of this study through the voices of the students and the class teacher. The aim was to cultivate a critically literate voice in students by equipping them with a metalanguage to express their understanding of the author's message in a multimodal text (NLG, 1996).
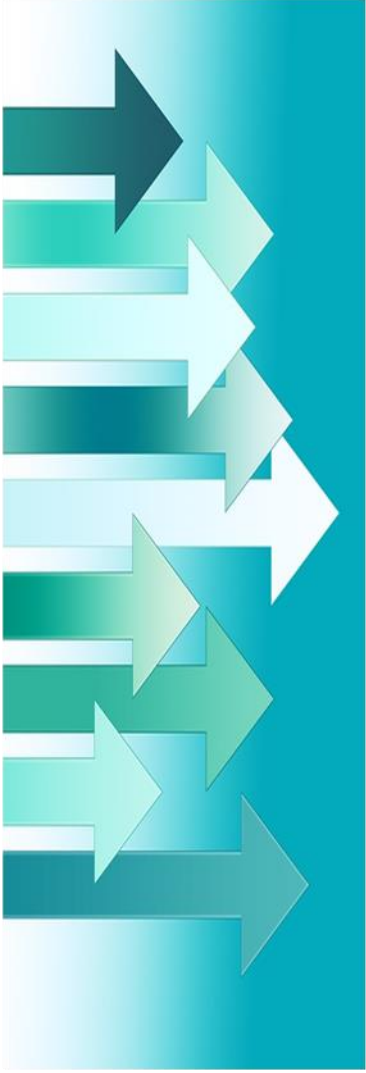
As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, the many definitions of critical literacy all recognise that quality texts contain messages that relate to personal and societal issues (Alford et al., 2019). This study focused on empowering students to take a critical stance in relation to the author's intended message in multimodal texts and to apply this stance to their own evolving personal values (Luke, 2000). The data presented in this chapter reflect the students' growing critically literate voice that emerged throughout the course of the study.

The findings of this study will be reported through the lens of the metafictive devices through the voices of the students (The Book Detectives) and the class teacher . The devices used by the authors in these texts gave The Book Detectives the language and clues to unlock the author's message. With growing confidence as this study progressed the students changed the way they engaged with these picturebooks, this is evidenced through their responses and is visually illustrated in figure

The devices in the multimodal texts are explored in this chapter to demonstrate the students' growing familiarity with the manner in which these devices carry the author's/illustrator's message and influence their ability to critically respond to a text. Each device is analysed and then reinforced by the voice of the students. This is then elaborated upon through the classroom experiences, with explicit references to the students' progress as critical readers, and ultimately, as Book Detectives, scouring the texts for clues as to the author's intent.

Figure 5.1

Evolution of the Year 3 Readers Into the Year 3 Book Detectives

Initial Behaviours	Enactment of critical and pragmatic practices.	Changed Behaviours at the Conclusion of the Study
Limited book knowledge.		Confidently discussed the components of a text.
No metafictive knowledge or metalanguage to express their understanding of the meaning of a text.		Could express an understanding of a text using the metalanguage to identify metafictive devices.
Negative reaction to picturebooks.		Enthusiastic response to reading picturebooks.
Low confidence in students who did not see themselves as readers.		All students saw themselves as readers.
Limited knowledge about multimodal texts No realisation that you could read pictures.		An understanding that words and pictures in these texts are interdependent and both modes are read.
Reluctance of many students to engage at a whole class level.		Joint construction of knowledge in readers circle.

5.2 Contributions to the Research

5.2.1 The Evolution of Effective Book Detectives Takes Time

The research findings were supported by the conceptual framework of this study, notably, Freebody and Luke's (1990) roles of text analyst and text participant.

To recap, in the initial session very little instruction was given to the students because I wished to observe their reactions to being presented with a picturebook to read. I was interested in their verbal responses and the way they handled the text. I introduced the metalanguage on intertextuality after they had read the initial text, *The Short and Incredibly Happy life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005), which had many examples of this device. I noticed that as the students were reading, they did not linger over the illustrations or try to work out their relationship to the words. Most completed the reading, looked up at me and waited to see what they were expected to do next. Their initial sharing as a whole class was at a fairly literal level—that it was a book about a pink rat that was happy. A few students commented that they thought the book was about not needing to own too many things and be happy with what you had. When asked whether the illustrations were necessary, they agreed that they were but did not elaborate except to mention that they knew Riley was a rat because of the illustrations.

What I observed was directly related to this research; the students did not demonstrate the ability to connect the deeper meaning of the text using both the words and the pictures nor did they recognise the metafictive devices to express this meaning. This was because they did not yet have the metalanguage to engage at that level. This study then has at its core developing in students a life-long skill of being able to interpret their multimodal world and form their own opinion, especially in today's troubling times. Intertextuality, as previously stated, was a prominent device used in the first text (and many of the texts to come). This was the reason it was introduced at this early stage of the study; I also felt that the students would grasp this concept quite quickly, which would build their confidence and give impetus to the rest of the study. This indeed proved to be the case.

This then presented me with a springboard to introduce the metalanguage to empower the students to express their understanding of the texts. I asked them to re-read *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005) and see whether there were any other texts in that book, for example, other books or paintings. The students were able to locate the paintings within the text but did not understand their significance or how they related to the story. I could see that I needed to explain to the students that the words and pictures both needed to be considered in a multimodal text and that they both contributed to the telling of the story. Looking back on the classroom experience, I realise the importance of that

development of the metalanguage. Rather than formally giving direct instruction on each device, I introduced them as the sessions evolved if that device was prominent in the text being shared.

It was evident as the study progressed that the students were empowered to share their interpretations of the texts by using the terminology of the metafictive devices. This also gave the students a credibility that encouraged them to take risks and freely express what they were thinking about the author's intent. I observed in the initial session that the students were not aware that the pictures were part of the text and therefore needed to be read. The power of this skill was vindicated at the conclusion of this study when I asked the students what they had learned about picturebooks. One student stated that the best thing I had taught them was how to read pictures. This, as with other information, was not done in a formal didactic manner but within the context of a text.

In Week 2, I introduced the students to the peritext because I noticed that they simply flipped the book open with no regard for the other components of the book. I explained about the front and back cover and what information they contained. We looked at the end papers at what information was there as well as the other pages such as the dedication and publisher's name. In addition to these elements being essential, the way they are arranged—with information on the covers and end papers—enhances the presentation and adds to the evolving story. This proved to be a very important part in their development of a critical stance in relation to the messages contained in picturebooks. I asked the students not to begin reading until everyone had their copy of the book (this was also an important and successful strategy that every student had their own copy of the text, thus they could read at their own pace). Instead, they were to read the peritext and see whether they could discover who the author was and whether the author was also the illustrator.

The students were also asked to read the blurb on the back of the book and any information about the author that they could find. This validated my decision to introduce these elements to the students. Once these features and their importance were pointed out, the students changed their reading and handling of a text. This change of practice and attitude, coupled with their enthusiasm, was exciting as was their respect for the whole text. The status of the picturebook was elevated, reflecting a shift from a passive acceptance of the text and a more critical approach to uncovering the author's message. The Book Detectives had begun to evolve.

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In Week 2, we read *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001). Now armed with the word 'intertextuality', I challenged the class in their reading to see whether there were any other texts within this text and why the author had used this device. As requested, they now took more time to explore the peritext before they began reading the body of the text. This knowledge changed their approach to reading the text; I observed that they were now actively interrogating the illustrations. Harvey and Goudvis (2013) stress the importance of this skill, stating that we need to give students an explicit range of tools to empower them to explore a text and make meaning. This was a strategy that I actively employed throughout the study, as demonstrated by the introduction of a metalanguage for the students to express their understandings of the narrative.

The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley (Thompson, 2005) also had other devices such as multiple pathways through the text, which introduced the students to self-referentiality. I decided at this stage not to introduce that exact terminology because I wanted to ensure they first successfully explored intertextuality. Having stated that point, we did discuss the change in the narrative and the different pathways the pigs took throughout their adventures. Janks (2014) importantly stated that by developing a critical stance, we raise the reader's conscious level regarding the devices used by the author to convey a certain perspective. This was evident early in this study in the students' change in attitude and engagement.

From this point onwards, the study gained momentum, as recorded in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. It was an expectation of this study that the students would, with the empowerment of critical strategies, become active participants in the reading process and be able to express their growing understanding of how authors position a reader to receive their message. As stated by Janks (2014), the reader needs to approach a text in a deliberate manner and develop an awareness of the tools being used by the author. Kress (2010) articulated that once the message has been received by the reader, the reader has the freedom to modify or accept the message. This perspective was very important in the study because I wanted the students to learn not just to accept the storyline or ideals but to question and even challenge the author's intent—not just for the sake of disagreeing but to decide whether the author's point of view agreed with their own evolving view of the world.

5.3 Book Detectives

By Week 3, I was calling the Year 3 students my 'Book Detectives' because they approached each new book with such enthusiasm to unlock the clues that the author had left to tell the story. I used the term 'Book Detectives' to not only acknowledge their growing ability to interrogate a text, but because the term demonstrates a constructivist stance on the construction of shared knowledge. This was a strength of the whole-class Readers' Circle, which supported the theoretical perspective underpinning this study, namely, social constructivism. The theoretical framework informed by social constructivism, that is, the notion that an individual constructs knowledge and understanding by means of collaborative interaction with others in a cultural context (Kukla, 2013). In this study, the students' construction of knowledge and understandings of critical literacy were socially situated and relied on interactions with others in context. Luke and Freebody (1999) articulated the need for literacy practices to 'shape and construct different literate repertoires in classrooms' (p. 6). This is an emic perspective because meaning is created from within the group. Such a perspective gave me a more intimate and authentic view of meaning-making because I was a participant in the meaning-making process.

The extract below demonstrates how I used the metalanguage associated with the metafictive devices in our discussions as part of the class vocabulary:

Carmel: Tell us about any intertextuality you found.

Student: All the books at the front cover and on the fourth page, they use all this to make the story.

Carmel: Did you find any other intertextuality?

Student: The Three Little Pigs.

Student: Rapunzel.

Student: Hey Diddle.

Student: Alice in the Wonderland and the rabbit and Rapunzel.

Freire (1970) articulated the need for students to be empowered to respond to challenges they face in learning, especially when taking a critical stance. This is an important perspective because the students' growing awareness of the way authors construct texts gave them the confidence to not only express their interpretation to the group but also to approach an unknown text. In facing these challenges, students feel less alienated, which leads to a feeling of commitment and agency as new

understandings evolve, reflecting 'education as the practice of freedom–as opposed to education as the practice of domination' (Freire, 1970, p. 81). The texts containing metafictive devices offered the students the power to build their understandings of themselves and their place in society. Freire (1970) continued that education needs to pose problems that give students this power to think critically about who they are in their world. This notion expressed by Freire was demonstrated in *No Bears*, which proved to be one of the most popular texts. The presence of other texts within the text was quite apparent and the students felt empowered to respond freely and with accuracy because of their knowledge of previous texts and their developing understanding of intertextuality as a device used by authors to tell the story.

In Week 5, we read *The Tunnel* by (Browne, 1989), which contained examples of intertextuality as demonstrated below:

> *Carmel: What do you think about this illustration?*
> *Student: There's lots of information and there's lots of old pictures of this story.*
> *Carmel: Yes, and there's a lot of what?*
> *Student: There's lots of the intertextuality.*
> *Student: Because there's pictures of stories in here.*
> *Student: And when she's in her room there's a picture of the wolf and then Little Red Riding Hood.*
> *Researcher: And what do you think this is?*
> *Student: And we thought this is Jack and the Beanstalk.*

Intertextuality had now become part of the conversation when discussing the messages in the texts and how the author told us the story. Luke and Freebody (1997) emphasised the importance of the social practices that readers engage in when making meaning of text as well as readers' abilities to analyse and critique texts, knowing that all texts reflect an author's and illustrator's intention (Luke & Freebody, 1997). The social interaction within the class was a strength that came through in this study; the students felt empowered by using the metalanguage associated with the metafictive devices as they developed their critical stance by evaluating the effectiveness of the authors' use of devices. These texts invite a reader to be intimately involved in the story; Goldstone (2004) described this as a powerful position for the reader.

Other interesting examples occurred in Weeks 8 and 10:

Student: They (the author) give you clues of what's on the pages.

Student: They use pictures as words.

Carmel: Anybody think of some of the devices that we've found out about?

Student: Intertextuality.

Carmel: Why do you think they use intertextuality in books?

Student: Make it more interesting.

Student: To show more stuff.

Carmel: Good, to give us more information.

Carmel: Some of the ways that authors tell stories?

Carmel: What's another word for pictures in a book?

Student: Illustrations.

Student: Intertextuality.

Carmel: Intertextuality. Why does that help? How does that help tell the story?

Student: Clues.

The class teacher's comments below demonstrated the shift in conversation reflecting the students' development of a metalanguage to discuss their interpretations of texts—an important skill as articulated by the NLG (1996). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) stressed the importance of giving students this skill to express their understanding of the interplay between text and image.

Critical literacy in our classroom has always been present but has now exploded into a new dimension. From reading picturebooks, chapter books, fiction and non-fiction, the children are now being more proactive in the process of reading. From finding intertextuality and irony and reading into the pictures and asking more questions my class has now discovered a new and exciting way of reading. The meaning of any picturebook we read now is debated, critically assessed using some of the techniques used in your [the researcher's] sessions and usually as a class, we come to some form of agreement as to what the author might have been trying to convey. (Class teacher at the conclusion of the study).

Using the term 'intertextuality' became a natural part of the students' vocabulary, which is evident in the interactions above. Brice-Heath (1983) described the conversations of children in her ethnographic study of two communities and their development of language; she highlighted the important skills of adaptability and

flexibility that children develop and their ability to shift roles and modify their language. While in a very different environment, the children in this study demonstrated the same skills as they learned the skills of manipulating their newly acquired metalanguage to express their understanding of picturebooks and their growing personal agency when it came to expressing their interpretation of a text. The power of the metafictive devices, especially intertextuality, shifted these students' understanding, interaction and responses to the text. Their skills of critical literacy improved with the realisation that authors use devices to convey their messages to the reader. Leland and Harste (2001) reinforced this skill, viewing the power of semiotics in a social setting as powerful. They continued that the trigger of semiotics can lead to the emergence of new questions and knowledge.

5.4 Metafictive Devices

5.4.1 Intertextuality

As mentioned previously, one of the devices that characterises multimodal texts is intertextuality. Intertextuality is the layering of many different texts within the one text (Pantaleo & Sipe, 2008). Barthes (1977) stated that no text is original but is composed from 'bits' of many texts. This is a deliberate device used in these picturebooks to create a pastiche of texts, images and ultimately, meaning. This can include references to other texts or the insertion of art works (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

Intertextuality proved to be a very powerful device to elicit meaning from texts during this study, playing an important role in moving the students from a passive stance to one where they actively pursued clues as to the meaning behind the text. The impact of this device changed the Year 3 students from simply accepting a picturebook at face value to eagerly scouring the text to find clues used by the author to convey the intended message. This was a powerful enactment of the conceptual framework of this study as the students gave a critical voice to their understandings of a text using the appropriate metalanguage. Thus, their knowledge of intertextuality paved the way to other devices as the Book Detectives realised that authors use many devices to position the reader into accepting their view of the world.

The first text that we explored was *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005). Although the class teacher had stated that critical literacy was a feature of her literacy program, in the first reading of this text, the students

were cooperative but passive when presented with a picturebook. They were not given instructions on how to read the text or what to look for but were simply encouraged to enjoy the reading. Each child in a class 23 was given a copy of the text and their reading behaviour was observed.

The students became motivated and quickly read the book but with little regard for the illustrations. When the reading was complete and the students were asked about the story, they gave very literal comments about the meaning of the text.

The following transcript demonstrate the early interactions between researcher and students, leading to the introduction of intertextuality when students commented on the famous painting in the text:

> Carmel: Does anyone know what Colin Thompson's message is?
> Student: You don't need that many things to live and you can have less things and, if you have less things, you can live [happier] because you don't need that many things to live.
> Student: That you don't need to change anything in your life. You just need to be happy.
> Student: Be happy with what you've got and not sad with what you don't have.

When asked whether the illustrations were necessary, they agreed they were because they helped to tell the story (although their reading behaviour did not demonstrate an interrogation of the illustrations at this early stage because they only read the words and quickly turned to the next section of text in the book). At this stage, the students were unaware of the power of authors to manoeuvre a reader into accepting a point of view. Rosenblatt (2004) stated that reading has many facets and is not only aesthetic or efferent but that readers need to read from a critical stance. When this critical stance is enacted, students have a heightened awareness of the devices used by the author and the knowledge that they as readers bring to a text. This critical stance is reflected in the Four Resources Model, in the role of text analysist. Luke and Freebody (1999) stressed that teaching literacy is about 'institutional shaping of social practices and cultural resources, about inducting successive generations into particular cultural, normative ways of handling texts' (p. 2). This was a critical point in this study because the students had not yet been exposed to this practice, as demonstrated by their lack of awareness of the whole text—that it was not just words with some decorative features but a multimodal text

with two forms of communication. Initially, the ability to make meaning from this text was not strongly demonstrated by the students, who did not engage with the illustrations that are ever-present in their multimodal world, and in this case, literature (Unsworth et al., 2019).

> Carmel: Does the book need illustrations and if so, why?
>
> Student: Because then you wouldn't know − what animal Riley was.

This quote clearly demonstrates that the students are not aware that the illustrations are not just there to give readers literal information but to challenge them, moving the readers from a comfortable place of reading to a more complex view of reading a text (Barthes, 1975). A couple of the students commented on the paintings embedded within the illustrations. They could see that they had been altered. I took this as an opportunity to introduce intertextuality because. This was a device that was quite explicit, once it had been explained to the students, and the altered paintings were an example of this device. One student knew what 'inter' meant and another recognised 'text'. I built on that knowledge. Interestingly, no student commented that these illustrations were part of the text; at this early stage in the study, they viewed the illustrations and words as separate components of the text and not interrelated. This aptly gives credence to the importance of this study and its conceptual framework to nurture readers who can deftly extract the meaning from a multimodal text by reading the words and pictures in conjunction and recognising the clues that the author has used in the form of metafictive devices to influence the reader into accepting a particular stance.

From that point in the study, the students relished the idea of other texts being embedded in a text and thus began to demonstrate the practice of interrogating a text. This lack of awareness of the interconnected nature of words and pictures was expressed in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), who argued that the ever-increasing complexity of images and text in media, newspapers and websites demands a sophisticated ability to decode and make critical decisions about their worth and validity. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) have also noted that in today's world of complex communications, there is an increasing need for competencies in critically analysing the multiple forms of literacy (multiliteracies) that we all encounter in our lives. Hence, literacy in the 21st century requires students to engage deeply in critically analysing a wide variety of texts and visual forms of information (Freebody & Luke, 1990). These claims have influenced this study and the findings

demonstrate that students can indeed move from a stance of passive acceptance to one of active inquiry—and in this study, detection.

The second book we read was *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001). This text has many other texts embedded within it as a device to build the narrative. The students began to discuss the presence of other texts and that it made the story confusing, but they realised at the end that the different characters helped create a new story that ended where it began. Again, the power of the device of intertextuality, which initially created confusion, was a necessary experience to realise why this device had been used by Wiesner and its effectiveness in building the narrative. Intertextuality is a device used in picturebooks to deliberately create a pastiche of text, images and ultimately, meaning. This can include references to other texts or the insertion of art works (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

> *Carmel: Tell me what you thought about at the beginning.*
>
> *Student: Oh well, it was weird because it said that the wolf had eaten the pig, but the pig wasn't eaten.*
>
> *Carmel: Did you like the book better after you'd finished it?*
>
> *Student: Yes.*
>
> *Carmel: Why?*
>
> *Student: Because I realised what happened.*
>
> *Carmel: Was it what you were expecting?*
>
> *Student: No.*

In Week 3, we read *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983). There was a brief discussion before reading the book about intertextuality and that it was a tool or device that authors used to help tell the story. An excerpt from my journal describes the session:

> *The students were able to articulate the message contained within the text that Hannah just wanted to be closer to her father. No one could explain the silences in the text, the fact that no mother was mentioned but eventually they understood Browne's approach, that there were gaps in the story for the reader to become a co-author. We discussed the use of framing and colour and the way Browne portrayed Hannah's feelings of isolation. They are beginning to move from the literal to the critical level in their responses and in the way, they read the text.*

This change in reading practice was observed quite early in this study. It demonstrates the impact of the metafictive devices and that the awareness of these devices and their associated metalanguage has given the students a tool by which to first realise that the author has engaged a particular device and second, that they, as readers, have the ability to recognise the device and examine its impact on the story. This is a validation of the conceptual framework of this study, namely, the journey from the Four Resources Model (Luke & Freebody, 1990) to the aim of this study, which is the development of a critically literate voice in students. The power of knowledge was being enacted in this class as they added the new skills to their ability to not only read but interact with a text at a critically literate level. Luke and Freebody (1999) stated that by critically analysing texts, the reader realises that the text is not neutral. Students need the skills to make sense of the world around them and apply these skills to taking a critical stance in matters that affect their lives (Alford et al., 2019). This point was made to the students; that authors have a message to impart and in the example of these picturebooks, the author uses metafictive devices to convey a message using words and pictures. The author wishes to influence the reader, so the reader needs to be aware that they are being positioned to receive the message. Luke and Freebody (1999) continued that students therefore need the opportunity to participate in meaningful literary practices. By alerting the students in this study to the devices that authors use, they began to not just passively accept a text but to interrogate (in this case) the multimodal features.

The students' responses to the use of metafictive devices were now beginning to influence the way they read and responded to the text, which is evident in the following transcript:

Student: There's a smiley face on the light switch and a gorilla face.

Carmel: And there's something else on that page. Can you see?

Student: Yes. A gorilla and the famous pictures.

Carmel: Yes. It's really called Whistler's Mother, but he's put a gorilla in it.

Student: When they were going up the stairs, there was a famous painting.

Carmel: It's the Mona Lisa.

Referring to the research question, I was beginning to see the effect of metafictive devices on the students' critical literacy emerging in classroom discussions. This was reflected in this particular student's ability to not only locate metafictive devices but to begin to understand why the author has used them.

Pantaleo (2005) asserted that metafictive devices give the reader a 'window' into how texts work. The students in this study used this knowledge of how texts work to express their understanding of the author's message and were thereby given a voice by using the metalanguage to express their ideas. This was demonstrated in the following dialogue:

> Carmel: And do you remember what we call that?
>
> Student: Intertextuality.
>
> Student: The movie Superman was in the book.
>
> Carmel: Excellent. Are there any other examples?
>
> Student: King Kong.
>
> Student: There is actually something which has given us a bit of a hint that he is the main cat (character) because on one of these pages, it's pointing towards him with the smoke stick.
>
> Carmel: What can you see in that page?
>
> Student: That there's supposed to be a person in the painting but it's a gorilla.

The term 'critical literacy' implies developing readers' abilities to 'read' with the understanding that: (1) words and their interrelations can be used to offer different contexts, viewpoints and positions from which readers deconstruct and/or construct thoughts and ideas and (2) images can also stand alone, be part of a text, or require an interaction between image and text (Janks, 2014). These students were beginning to demonstrate a more critical stance in their reading.

5.4.2 Self-referentiality

Another device that influenced the students' change in reading these picturebooks was self-referentiality. This is defined by Sipe and McGuire (2008) as a device that challenges the reader to become an active, not passive reader. The metafictive stance draws the reader's attention to personal experiences and to adopt a questioning stance regarding the construction and presentation of the text. The inclusion and exclusion of elements from the text draw the reader into a more active role. The reader is thereby involved in the actual process of storytelling (Goldstone, 2004).

The term 'self-referentiality' was not explicitly used but the children understood the term 'self-connection', which they understood as being able to relate to events or situations that they had encountered in the texts we shared. This was

demonstrated by the students' changed approach to reading picturebooks, their use of metalanguage and confidence in the actual physical handling of the texts. Even students who had struggled with reading were now approaching an unknown text with confidence.

The comments from the teacher's post study reflection support this development:

> *The strugglers didn't have to take a back seat to the good readers in fear of feeling incompetent when reading. The process of reading the pictures and becoming Book Detectives also was inspiring for these children* (Teacher Interview).

Janks (2010) pointed out that while a text positions us to receive the author's point of view, this is not necessarily a negative or sinister ploy. Although texts could 'have designs on us' (Janks, 2010, p. 98), what readers need is the ability to recognise that they are being positioned and to critically analyse the stance of the author. Indeed, this ability is specified in the ACE (e.g. the Year 3 content description, 'Identify the point of view in a text and suggest alternative points of view' ACELY1675 (ACARA, 2019b).

The skill of handling the whole book, which is viewed as self-referentiality, was an unexpected consequence of the students' development of an interrogative stance to reading. The students demonstrated heightened excitement and pleasure when presented with a new text. In the first week, I explained all the features of a book, the peritext, end papers the author's and/or illustrator's name, the blurb on the back and any dedication or biography about the author. The Week 5 excerpt from my journal reflects this shift in their approach to reading a picturebook. This new knowledge about all the components of a text added to the students' growing sense of personal agency when reading and expressing their understanding of a text.

Goldstone (1989) stated that understanding of texts is often weak when students do not have the capacity to interpret images; indeed, Goldstone stated that the sophisticated understanding of images can only occur 'when the child has developed visual awareness to interpret, evaluate and creatively construct meaning from the image' (p. 593). He continued that literacy cannot develop until students bring their own understanding of texts and images to the narrative.

The following interactions with the students demonstrate their growing self-referentiality as they bring their prior knowledge and newly acquired understanding of how texts work.

Week 1: *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005)

Carmel: 'They want microwave, video, DVD, SMS, internet, big car. Cost more than yours. Gold, diamond, electronic, gigabyte, fastest, biggest and smallest machines' (p. 13). Can anyone explain that?

Student: I think it's abbreviations.

Carmel: That was a good thought. Why are all those things put together like that and you read it quite quickly? Anyone know?

Student: Because it's a list.

Carmel: Okay. Electronic. Anyone know what that means?

Student: Like gaming and something that moves on pixels.

Student: It uses internet.

Student: It uses batteries.

Student: It can use power.

Week 5*: No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011)

Student: The books are the toys.

Student: All of the books—all of these books are from—she's thinking all of these books are from her toys but they're from the books and she uses them in all of the pages in the books.

Student: There's a book in a book in a book.

In Week 5, the students began to apply information given in Week 1 to the physical text:

Carmel: And why do you think that end papers are different? What's different about the end papers from the front and the back?

Student: Because the book and the soccer ball are together and that means that they're friends now.

In Week 8, we looked at *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010), which gave the students the vehicle to express their growing understanding of how their own self-knowledge and self-connection (self-referentiality) was influencing their interpretations of the text. As Goldstone (1989) indicated, '[l]iteracy cannot occur until children recognise that they bring their own schema, their own storehouse of

mental images, to the printed page' (p. 295). The students' continued and natural use of metalanguage was also evident in their interpretations of the texts.

The conversation below focuses on a father (or grandfather) who was suddenly missing from the text and the students drew upon their own experiences of family. Goldstone (2004) stated that even though picturebooks containing metafictive devices invite readers into the book, they still keep them grounded by reminding them that this could relate to their everyday life. In other words, the student must make connections within the text (self-referentiality). This was a very powerful discussion in terms of the students freely expressing what they were feeling and using the skills they were acquiring to construct meaning.

> *Student 1: They give you clues of what's on the pages.*
>
> *Student 2: They use pictures as words.*
>
> *Carmel: They use illustrations, very good.*
>
> *Student 3: Maybe he passed away.*
>
> *Student 4: He could've gone to the shops without telling her.*
>
> *Carmel: It's a story and what is the author trying to tell us? Why would you put your heart away somewhere?*
>
> *Student 5: Because she's really upset.*
>
> *Carmel: What else do you think hearts are used for, symbol?*
>
> *Student 6: That they represent that you love someone.*
>
> *Student 7: When the girl didn't realise her dad wasn't there anymore when she took the heart out, she felt sad and lonely and she didn't want anyone to come near her heart.*
>
> *Carmel: Suddenly, the book's changed, hasn't it? It's gone from a happy book to a wondering book. What do you think?*
>
> *Student 7: She's feels unsure and upset.*
>
> *Carmel 8: Well, why is the author telling us that?*
>
> *Student 8: She put it away because she was lonely, and she was sad, and she didn't want anyone to touch her heart.*
>
> *Student 9: Her heart might've been broken, and she didn't want it to break anymore so she wanted to put it in a safe place.*
>
> *Carmel: What do you think now?*
>
> *Student 9: That she's trying to get the bottle to break so she can have the heart back again.*

Carmel 9: What's she trying to do with her heart in the end?

Student 10: She's trying to break it out so she can get feelings back.

Carmel: What do you think Oliver Jeffers is trying to tell us?

Student 10: Everyone has different feelings.

The self-referential nature of picturebooks containing metafictive devices, according to Sipe and McGuire (2008), invites readers to become more aware of their own thinking and engagement with the text. As Barthes (1976) stated, readers are moved out of their 'comfortable practice of reading' (p. 14). This device that the students demonstrated was influencing their interaction and understanding of the texts and gave them the skills to develop their critical stance and fully engage at a deeper level when interpreting the text (Sipe & McGuire, 2008).

5.4.3 Blurring of Boundaries

Picturebooks containing metafictive devices also employ a strategy—the blurring of boundaries between what could be viewed as elite culture, different genres and the hierarchical space between reader and author. Intertextuality breaks the barriers between 'popular and high culture' (Pantaleo & Sipe, 2008, p. 3) by introducing works of art into the text. What this means in practice is that the reader needs to engage in the text at a different level. Passive acceptance of the text will not lead to understanding. Often the reader is directly addressed by the author or challenged to open a book or read it in a certain way. According to Sipe and McGuire (2008), this interaction is one in which the author acknowledges the reader's place within the text and their critical role in the reading process. Anstey (2002) stated that readers can now engage with such texts in new ways and have many opportunities to participate in meaningful ways. This more intimate relationship between the students and author became increasingly evident as the weeks progressed. The following excerpts illustrate this growing understanding of the blurring of boundaries device:

Week 2: *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001).

Student: I have a comment for the story. Well I think that the author should put in the story if he remakes one that the story goes to the [wolf] and so, like, when they fold up the page he gets, like, stuck in a box.

Week 2*: Gorilla* (Browne, 1983)

Carmel: What is common in those three pages?

Student: Her father is not taking much notice of her.

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Student: On this page, he's reading a newspaper and not looking at her.

Student: This page he's working and this page she's just alone.

Carmel: How is she isolated?

Student: She's standing here and her dad's all the way over there.

Student: Because it's all dark.

Carmel: And who's she sitting with?

Student: No one.

Carmel: That last page. The one where dad's leaning over her. The last large illustration. Anthony Browne's teasing you. He wants to see if you've picked up his hint. What is it?

Student: There's a banana in his back pocket.

Week 7*: The Singing Hat* (T. Riddle, 2000)

Carmel: What is a word to describe Colin Jenkins?

Student: Smart.

Student: Kind.

Student: Caring.

Student: He would never give up.

Student: Intelligent.

Student: Faithful.

Student: Creative.

In the students' discussion, it was becoming obvious that they understood that the author was using various metafictive devices to tell the story and engage them as readers. This breaking down of barriers between the reader and author lead to the realisation that while the author has the power to manoeuvre the reader into accepting their position, the reader also has the power to acknowledge and challenge the author. This awareness reflects a developing critical stance in relation to the reading of a multimodal text.

5.4.4 Playful Use of Text

Picturebooks containing metafictive devices also have an innovative and playful nature, which sets them apart from other picturebooks. This playful characteristic can be in the form of the creative use of font or the arrangement of the words on the page—referred to by Pantaleo and Sipe (2008) as a 'semiotic playground' (p. 3). Even if the message behind the text has a sombre tone, this unusual layout and picture/word relationship can be present. Barthes (1976) stated

that there are two types of texts: ones that are comfortable to read (pleasure) and others that are 'bliss'; in other words, they set us wondering and move us into an uncomfortable place. Picturebooks containing metafictive devices aim to move us to this uncomfortable place and engage the reader using the devices explored thus far. Kress (2000) stated that language is always evolving and that readers can respond to texts that use semiotics to engage and explore issues. The creative nature of these texts captured the interest of the Year 3 class in this study. Each week when I arrived, I was met with such enthusiasm and with the questions: 'What are we reading today?' 'Will it have intertextuality or irony or clues that the author used to tell the story?' This engagement in reading was noted in the class teacher's reflection and is a stark contrast to her expectations of the study:

> *From the very first session, I was curious as to how my class would respond as there is such a range in levels of reading and reading books themselves would not be their first choice. Although the children did love for me to read a story to them, reading to themselves was a struggle for some. The change in their attitude, attentiveness and response to reading each week grew with excitement. The children would look forward to having a book to themselves to read each week. From looking more thoughtfully at the cover while waiting for the class to start reading and the way they attended to the pictures and meaning within each book was amazing for me to watch.* (Class teacher, post study reflection)

The following excerpts illustrate the power of the playful use of font, spatial arrangement and semiotics on the students, who moved from a polite acceptance of being handed a book to read, to excited, inquisitive and motivated Book Detectives.

Week 1: *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005)

Carmel: So, was there anything strange in that book to you?

Student: It has funny pictures.

Student: It has a baby that eats a burger whole.

Student: That when the baby was eating the burger, the dad didn't really care.

Student: It looks like it's very old.

Carmel: What makes you think it looks a bit old?

Student: Because the pictures, it looks like they're old and a bit crumpled up.

Student: I think first that it is a big one and it has curls on it.

Carmel: The font. The font's got curls on it.

Week 3: *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983)

Student: That the bushes and the trees are a gorilla.

Carmel: Do you know what the silence is in the book?

Student: It might be the book isn't telling us if dad's a gorilla or not.

Student: Her dad and the gorilla had both brown eyes.

Week 6: *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (Thompson, 2008)

Carmel: What information can you get from this double spread?

Student: It's a bit lonely.

Student: That his father and mother have gone away or died.

Carmel: What's the difference between the first double spread and the last double spread?

Student: That on the first double spread it's a lot darker because they're a lot more lonely and then, on the last one, it's a lot more bright because they're having a lot more fun and they're not that lonely anymore.

Carmel: Look at the way the words are written. What can you tell me?

Student: That they're not in the book like they normally are?

Student: They're on, like, a piece of paper.

Student: All sad colours for me. Like, it says sadness.

The playfulness of these texts is reflected by the students beginning to engage with this device and not just accepting what is on the page. The students are developing a more critical stance—in its infancy at this stage—but nonetheless emerging. With the discussions beginning to move from literal comments to a more interrogative stance, the students were no longer just accepting the images, words, font and their arrangement on the page was there by accident. They realised that the author had intent in the arrangement of the information on the page and how it was displayed. According to Mills (2016), students need to be taught 'flexible and wide-ranging social competencies' (p. 42). Continuing that students need the skills to challenge the voice of the author, Mills (2016) built on the notion of agency and that although institutions such as schools may offer a constrained view of what this means, students need to be able to challenge hidden curricula and develop their own critical stance in relation to textual engagement. This engagement in Week 4 demonstrated the beginning of that critical stance and the ability to recognise the metafictive devices used by the author.

Week 4: *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011)

Student: That the bear was actually talking to the princess, not the fairy godmother.

Student: Because on some of the pages it shows that the fairy godmothers got a paintbrush and she's left out.

Carmel: Okay. Now what do you think we call that? What did we say we could find in this book? A lot of?

Student: Irony.

Carmel: So, what do you think is the main type of irony in this book?

Student: It says on the front of the book, 'No bears', and there's a bear in it sneaking up and stuff.

Carmel: And what's the bear doing?

Student: He's trying to help.

Student: By trying to get the monster away and doing stuff so it gets distracted or doing stuff so he can't do it.

Carmel: Does it disrupt the story? Who's trying to cause trouble?

Student: The fairy.

Carmel: Well done. What's the fairy doing?

Student: She's the one who's writing all of the things, there are no bears in the book and that's why she has writed it all in the book because she doesn't like books.

Carmel: What can you tell me about the font?

Student: The writing is light and then it goes into dark.

Week 9: *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000)

Student: I've got something that I noticed.

Student: I've noticed the lost thing here and the lost thing giving the arrows to him so she can go to his home.

Student: I think this person drawed them to help the lost thing go home.

Student: On the instruction words.

In Week 10, *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005) was reviewed to gauge the change in the students' responses to texts with metafictive devices and their more critical stance in reading picturebooks.

Carmel: Clues. Remember we are now Book Detectives and detectives need clues to solve the problems, don't they? To work out what it's all about. What do authors do?

Student: They use different types of font.

Carmel: Excellent. Different types of font. Why? Why do they use different types of font? Why don't they just have ordinary printing going across the page?

Student: It's to show how the characters are saying it.

Carmel: Any other reasons they use unusual font?

Student: The punctuation.

Student: Maybe if the colour is different, maybe it's telling you the mood they're in.

Student: It stands out.

Carmel: It stands out, yes. Okay, any other tools that authors use? What about when we know something quite funny sometimes, but the main character doesn't know it?

Student: Irony?

Carmel: Any self-connection happening?

Student: The hamburger.

Carmel: What was I doing when I was reading?

Student: Your pace was really fast.

Carmel: My pace was fast. Why?

Student: You had expression.

Carmel: What do people do if they exaggerate?

Student: They be louder.

The teaching of critical literacy in schools can often be minimal with a simple emphasis on the development of decoding skills (Turner, 2014). Evans (2009) stated that students do not obtain meaning from merely reading alone, but that the complexity of understanding a text can be developed through shared oral responses that offer differing perspectives on a text. This was evident in this study as the students who were struggling with reading and understanding texts gained confidence in their voice being heard. Their growing knowledge of the devices authors use gave these students a newfound power and personal agency when

reading a text, reflecting the acquisition of the skills referred to in the conceptual framework of this study.

> *Student: That Riley had the happiest life because he found someone that he could spend the rest of his life with.*
>
> *Carmel: What's Colin Thompson's message?*
>
> *Student: He's trying to tell us 'Don't ask for stuff all the time'.*
>
> *Student: Don't want stuff that other people have.*

> *After the first week's reading, I would admit that I didn't expect much change in my reluctant readers' attitude. It was with a heart-warming pleasure that I saw these little people begin to respond to reading with great wonder and excitement.* (Class teacher post study reflection)

The research of the NLG (1996) had an important influence on the conceptual framework of this study by focusing on transforming practice in relation to critical framing, which is a skill that students need to cultivate to be able to critique what they understand about their culture. Students then need to apply this knowledge to their evolving understanding of their world, these skills coupled with the skills of text analysist (Luke & Freebody, 1990) have influenced the structure of the framework underpinning this study.

5.4.5 Multiple Pathways

Another device and challenge for the reader are the multiple story lines and pathways through a picturebook with metafictive devices. These texts also resist a predictable ending and the 'happily ever after' syndrome. Indeed, these texts often have very open endings, leaving the reader wondering and perhaps co-authoring and coming to their own conclusion. This also gives the reader agency in relation to a personal interpretation of a text. These texts offer students an opportunity to engage with the devices on many levels and with varying degrees of finesse and understanding. Moebius (2009) used a metaphor that describes the relationship between text and illustrations as 'plate tectonic'. This creates an image of words and illustrations 'sliding and scraping against each other' (p. 313). This analogy aptly describes the characteristics of these picturebooks and indeed, aptly describes the devices listed by Sipe and McGuire (2008). Many traditional texts have a predictable pattern or pathway through the storyline. However, these texts deviate from the

original plot and change direction. They may also have multiple voices within the one narrative.

The following excerpts demonstrate this device.

Week 2: *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001)

Student: I like the part when they made the paper aeroplane and I got confused when the story changed.

Student: I got confused how they could move the pages.

Student: That you should stay in your own book instead of going into somebody else's.

Carmel: So, what happens at the very end?

Student: They return back to their story.

Student: It's better to be in your own book. If you don't go in your own book, then you won't fit in with it.

Carmel: Oh, because all these different people came into the book from outside the book?

Student: Yes.

Carmel: Does that make it confusing, does it?

Student: Yes.

The Singing Hat (T. Riddle, 2000) is quite a sophisticated text and because of its complexity and subverted messages, it was read in Week 6, when the students had some experience of interrogating a text and reading the pictures. The excerpt from my journal revisits the classroom.

Carmel: Why didn't he rip that nest off and throw it in the bin?

Student: Because he cared about the birds.

Student: Because he can't just destroy nature.

Student: That would be rude to the animals.

Student: Because it's nature's property.

Carmel: Why don't the words tell us all that information?

Student: Because the pictures tell you.

Carmel: Which page do you think's important?

Student: The page where the man exclaims how that he thinks that the bird that's on top of his head is the rarest one on earth.

Carmel: Why doesn't it say all that in the words?

Student: Because he wants you to read the pictures.

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Carmel: Which page did you choose?

Student: The last page because when the man was thoughtful of letting the birds come back to their home, he put the nest outside the window of his room.

This puzzling book, with its varied illustrative styles, did not dampen the students' enthusiasm or engagement with the text. With their change in attitude to reading the words and pictures and expecting the unexpected, they were beginning to search for meanings rather than be discouraged by complexity. Sipe and McGuire (2008) stated that this device offers multiple meanings and pathways that leave the reader 'hanging'; however, these students were beginning to see this as normal. Nodelman (1988) explained that not only does the reader need to read the words but the added complexity of the images offers a challenging intersection that may clarify or complicate the intended message.

Metafictive picturebooks often contain great subtleties as well, which is another challenge for readers as they search for meaning (Nodelman, 1988). Rosenblatt (2013), in her writing on transacting with the text, pointed out that a text is merely signs on paper until a reader interacts with the text. This transaction became an important aspect of this study, especially because the students shared their transaction in a whole-class setting. As their confidence grew, they were willing to take risks and add to the constructive nature of the lessons. This gave the process of meaning-making a much deeper pool of ideas and viewpoints to draw from and supported those students who initially were reluctant readers. One interesting comment from a student who found reading challenging came in the final week of the study. When the students were asked to share any new skill they had learned, this student put up his hand and said: 'The best thing you taught us is how to read the pictures, now I love books' (Year 3 student).

The Lost Thing (Tan, 2000) that we read in Week 9 is an example of the highly complex set of codes that can appear in picturebooks. Evans (2009) stated that when young children engage in reading picturebooks, they have a range of emotional responses since it is a multisensory experience. They can also be challenged intellectually.

Carmel: Where did the thing actually belong?

Student: Where all the other lost things were.

Carmel: Why didn't anyone go up to the lost thing?

Student: They were too busy doing what they want to do themselves.

Student: They didn't really care about it that much.

Student: They could be terrified of it.

All of the texts that were used in this study either had pathways and/or endings that required the ability to critically read the words and pictures. Even though the ending at times appeared 'happy', the students needed to realise that the author had used devices that required them to engage in the reading of the words and pictures and draw conclusions about omissions and additions to texts. An excerpt from my journal illustrates the students reading to make connections.

I was observing the students as they waited for all the books to be distributed, discussing the cover, end papers and other elements to see if there were any clues about the content of the story. I also noticed that when they completed reading, they would go back to these elements of the text to check for additional information or to confirm what they thought. This is a very impressive shift in their book handling skills. I noticed some children making notes on the supplied paper; I was going to stop them and tell them just to enjoy reading but I decided not to interfere.

5.4.6 Undermining the Traditional Stance

The deliberate undermining of the traditional premise that a story exists in itself and is not connected to the outside world is another device used in picturebooks containing metafictive devices. These books often appear as a parody of a conventional story. *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001) read in Week 2 (which was early in the study) offered this challenge to the students. This text has multiple pathways because the pigs appear to be in and out of the story. Originally the pigs are blown out of the story by the wolf, but they continue to appear in and out of their adventure throughout the text. *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011) also demonstrates the use of parody. At this early stage, the students were a little mystified by the storyline. However, this did not impinge on their reading enjoyment.

Carmel: So, what happens at the very end?

Student: They return back to their story.

5.4.7 Subversion of Boundaries

By Week 8, the students were demonstrating changed reading practices as they recognised the subversion of boundaries between the story and the real world and were making connections when reading. Picturebooks containing metafictive

devices invite the reader into the story by this clever subversion of previous boundaries dictated by the author. Goldstone (2004) elaborated that readers become aware of another world outside the text and that connections are made to the reader's own life. Rosenblatt (2002) viewed this as an aesthetic stance, in which the reader displays an awareness of the reading process and what this experience feels like as well as the connections being made between the reader and the text. One student's responses to *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010) demonstrate this connection:

> *Carmel: How do you feel when you read the first half of the book? It's quite…*
>
> *Student: Lonely.*
>
> *Student: Miserable.*
>
> *Student: Empty inside.*
>
> *Student: Sad and lonely and scared.*
>
> *Student: Sad, lonely and cold.*
>
> *Student: You won't always feel alone and in the book, she had her heart in her body, but the bottle was empty. It felt lonely.*
>
> *Student: She's trying to break it out so she can get feelings back.*
>
> *Carmel: Yes, so she can get her feelings back. She's trying to take the heart out of the bottle and feel. Who can find the page that shows me she's trying to get her feelings back?*
>
> *Student: This one. She's got a hammer in her hands.*
>
> *Carmel: How are some of the ways she tried to get her heart back?*
>
> *Student: She tried to break it out and she dropped it.*

This comment required a very sophisticated interrogation of the text and the ability to make connections. O'Brien (2009) stated that critical literacy begins to exist in classrooms after you have done a few activities rather informing students that as a reader they need to take a stance. This was a concept that I wanted students to understand; that no text is neutral and that authors have a message and stance to convey to the reader, which is reflected in the aim of this study. Critical literacy is not something you 'do' to students. O'Brien (2009) continued in her classroom practice that educators need to take a critical stance and investigate the practices that authors employ. Rosenblatt (2002) maintained that the reader takes a stance either consciously or unconsciously; in this study, I wanted students to be aware of the stance being suggested by the author and how that suggestion was being presented. I

also wanted them to be aware of how they began to develop their own stance to the devices used by the author and to express that stance with a critically literate voice.

5.5 Teacher Reflection

As illustrated in this section, the class teacher—while supportive of this study—was sceptical whether these texts with their metafictive devices would encourage or indeed empower her class to be more engaged in reading. Her reflection attests to the impact of the metafictive devices—not only on the skills level of her students but also on the enjoyment they gained, which was reflected in their changed attitude to reading. After two weeks, the teacher asked whether she could sit with a couple of the students who found reading challenging and become a participant in the class to learn with the students. The teacher had her own copy of the book and like the students, was actively engaged in the reading while supporting the students at her table.

> *From the very first session, I was curious as to how my class would respond as there is such a range in levels of reading and reading books themselves would not be their first choice. Although the children did love for me to read a story to them, reading to themselves was a struggle for some. The change in their attitude, attentiveness and response to reading each week grew with excitement. The children would look forward to having a book to themselves to read each week. From looking more thoughtfully at the cover while waiting for the class to start reading and the way they attended to the pictures and meaning within each book was amazing for me to watch.* (Class teacher, post study reflection)

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of the study were expressed through the voices of the Year 3 Book Detectives and their teacher, supported by the data in relation to the research questions. The chapter demonstrated the relationship between the students' growing understanding of metafictive devices and their impact on the students' ability to critically approach a text and express their understanding of the tools used by the author to tell the story. The students also began to realise that the author can manoeuvre the reader into accepting their point of view. Rosenblatt (2002) stated that each individual experience in reading is different, dependent on the many external influences in the readers' lives.

The richness of the whole-class perspective was one element which gave this study a constructivist approach and was, I believe, instrumental in developing the students' critical awareness of the range of reactions that can be evoked by metafictive devices in picturebooks. From Week 1, in which the students viewed the text through a neutral lens and passively accepted what they read at a literal level, to Week 10, in which they actively interrogated the text and searched for the metafictive devices, was a journey that demonstrated the power of texts containing metafictive devices to empower students to be active not passive readers. The referential devices were woven throughout the reading experience and enabled the students to engage with an aesthetic stance to the author's message (Rosenblatt, 2002). The development of a metalanguage and shared whole-class discussion gave students a voice and agency to confidently express their growing understanding of the mechanics behind a text and an awareness that no text is neutral (Goldstone, 2004). No longer are secrets hidden from the reader when they become aware of the devices used by the author.

One of the benefits of all students engaging in a shared dialogue was that students were stimulated by other students' ideas and responses to the texts. When they realised that even an unusual response to a text could be viewed as acceptable, their confidence and risk-taking grew. Bull and Anstey (2019) stressed the importance of this shared dialogic talk because it gives students an insight into how others formulate ideas. Reynolds (2007) stated that texts such as *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), which was shared in Week 2, begins with the known and then breaks the expected boundaries. This proved to be an effective choice since it started with the students' comfort zone and then challenged what they knew about the metafictive devices used in picturebooks. Anstey and Bull (2006) pointed out that the multimodal nature of picturebooks offers students a connection between printed texts and the multimodal texts that proliferate their world. School-based learning is dominated by the written word and pictures are only used as a support. However, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) stated that students need to be able to 'read' multimodal texts just as fluently and that schools need to equip students with the ability decode this 'new semiotic order' (p. 34).

Being able to read the pictures began to develop the children's repertoire of critical literacy skills as they realised in *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983) that the positioning

of the father and daughter on the opening page emphasised the distance in their relationship.

> *Carmel: What does Hannah want more than anything else in the world?*
>
> *Student: Her dad to spend time with her.*
>
> *Carmel: What is common in those three pages?*
>
> *Student: Her father is not taking much notice of her.*
>
> *Student: On this page, he's reading a newspaper and not looking at her.*
>
> *Student: This page he's working and this page she's just alone.*
>
> *Student: They're sitting separate and the dad is too busy reading the newspaper.*

While the metafictive devices used by authors in picturebooks have been discussed separately, their overlap and their interaction vary in different books depending on the choice of the author. It should be noted that all the six devices were recognised at various levels and emphasis during this study. However, intertextuality, which was the first device explored, lit the fire for the Book Detectives. What is important to note is how readily students can develop the ability to read the words and pictures using the metalanguage of these devices to express how authors use these devices to not only tell a story, but to move the reader to accepting the authors' view of the world. It also positions the students to develop their own point of view and discount that of the author, in other words, the ability to be critically literate.

The constructivist model that underpinned this study gave students the opportunity to jointly construct their meanings of the texts and articulate the use of the metafictive devices used by the authors. Dialogue in children's construction of meaning in this study was therefore an important tool. Halliday (2013) suggested that early narratives that children create are dialogic; thus, this narrative-building within the class was key for all students in the evolution of their critical literacy. By using the associated metalanguage, they were able to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other. In so doing, they unwittingly validated the conceptual framework underpinning this study, demonstrating the strength of the Readers' Circle approach that gave a voice to all students in the class.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: All Students Can Become Book Detectives

Before I became a book detective I did not like books… Now I love them!

(Year 3 student)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the study's major findings by answering the research questions. It also presents implications for future classroom practice as a result of this study. The aim of this study was to explore the influence of metafictive devices in picturebooks on Year 3 students' critical literacy by answering the following questions:

1. What are the metafictive devices in carefully selected award-winning children's picturebooks?
2. To what extent do picturebooks and their metafictive devices influence young children's critically literate voice?
3. What pedagogical approaches support children's development of a metalanguage to express their critically literate voice?
4. Does the expression of a metalanguage related to picturebooks with metafictive devices empower children's critically literate voice?

6.2 Answers to Research Questions

6.2.1 Research Question 1: What Are the Metafictive Devices in Carefully Selected Award-Winning Children's Picturebooks?

As detailed in Chapter 2, quality picturebooks contain metafictive devices that offer the author tools to convey their message in a multimodal format. Chapter 4 highlighted how quality children's picturebooks are designed to engage children in the contemplation of social and cultural issues in our world. Authors and illustrators skilfully create engaging narratives to empower children and youth to consider, understand and develop a critical eye of the world in which they live. This is very pertinent in this current climate as the world struggles to realign cultural beliefs and practices. These texts offer students a safe place to begin to explore their own beliefs about how we live in and care for our world. By exploring an author's thought processes within the structure of a narrative, security is offered to students, allowing them to challenge, modify or accept the view of the author. When the students in this study gained an awareness of the author as a person with their own views of the

world, it lifted the veil of anonymity through which they viewed the mysterious role of an unknown author. The comprehensive analysis of the award-winning books chosen for this study showed an in-depth use of all metafictive devices. This empowered the students—as their knowledge of the devices developed—to scour the texts for ideas, clues and information with which to engage with the text more meaningfully.

6.2.2 Research Question 2: To What Extent Do Picturebooks and Their Metafictive Devices Influence Young Children's Critically Literate Voice?

Picturebooks containing metafictive devices are acknowledged as rich, complex and enticing works of literature with exceptional illustrations that are recognised as works of artistic merit. I fully support this theory and I have seen the rewards in using such quality literature, in all its beauty and complexity, in this study. The quality of the texts used in this study (and of course hundreds of others) offers a rich blank canvas for the students to adorn with their own interpretations and opinions. The complexity of the sometimes seemingly simple texts is the paradoxical richness that beckons the reader to engage with the metafictive devices and partake in co-authorship of the narrative when presented with a gap between the words and pictures. This study has demonstrated that no matter what perceived instructional level a student is deemed to have attained, there is the opportunity that indeed should extend to an invitation to be part of the class exploration of the text.

As previously stated, this study did not contain long explanations describing the metafictive devices in the picturebooks. This is because I did not wish to 'clutter' the sessions with long monologues, but rather slowly build the excitement level as each device was revealed in the context of a narrative where it made a visible impact on the telling of the story. For example, after the initial reading of *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005) when the students gave very limited and literal responses, I pointed out intertextuality because the book had numerous instances of this device, especially the references to well-known art works. While the majority of the students could not name the art works, some did recognise that they were famous paintings.

With the next and subsequent readings each week, and with a reminder of the device before they began reading, the students began looking for that device. This snowballed as their knowledge of different devices grew. I told them about the devices and also informed them that authors use these devices to narrate the story

from their point of view and that they did not have to agree with the author's perspective.

While intertextuality was present in *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005), we agreed that it was the device that captured the students' attention; in other words, it appeared to be their favourite device. We also explored the use of irony, which can be a challenging concept for this age group. However, after reading *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011) the students realised how irony introduced humour and also questioning into the role of the bear in the narrative. In fact, the class teacher told me that in the days leading up to my next visit, the students were hoping for another book that contained irony! The use of semiotics, which we referred to as signs and symbols, was applied to our reading of the texts. We also applied the connection to their own experiences in understanding the construction of the text (self-referentiality), which we called 'self-connection' because the students had previously encountered this term.

Another device that was unwittingly demonstrated by the students was the change in status between reader and author. The previously hierarchical figure of the author changed when we discussed the fact that although the author was in a powerful position because of their ability to employ metafictive devices in the creation of the text, we as readers did not have to adopt the author's view if we disagreed with their view of the world. I felt it was important that students knew who was behind the scenes pulling the strings, as it were, to influence their reading of the texts. While students knew that authors wrote books, I felt that verbalising the fact that no text was neutral was empowering knowledge, thus changing the status of the author–reader power balance. This was potent knowledge for the students that aided in developing agency to adopt a critical stance when reading and responding to a text.

6.2.3 Research Question 3: What Pedagogical Approaches Support Children's Development of a Metalanguage to Express Their Critically Literate Voice?

The critical literacy that these students developed in reading and responding to texts in a constructivist Readers' Circle more than fulfilled the curriculum expectations for this age. At the beginning of this study, I set the scene for our Readers' Circle, saying that all responses were welcome, and that they would not be regarded as correct or incorrect but accepted at that point in time. Their ability to view a text from many perspectives and read the different modes changed their view

of themselves as readers. As the weeks progressed, they assumed a more powerful and dominant role in the Readers' Circle. Their ability to express their interpretation of the narrative fuelled the growth of not only their critical literacy skills but also of the confidence to employ their newly discovered skills.

The Readers' Circle encompassed the class as a whole with the students sitting in table groups. These groups remained fairly static throughout the study although occasionally the students would rearrange themselves; in other words, there was no ability grouping. Originally the class teacher was going to keep a checklist for me but admitted after a couple of weeks that she did not feel confident in identifying the metafictive devices that the students were engaging with. The class teacher chose to sit with two students that she felt could use extra support in their reading of the texts. In reality, the class teacher morphed into one of the students and became very engaged in each session.

This pedagogical approach to sharing understandings about the text proved to be very successful, especially as each child had their own copy of the text to read and did not have to share the reading. This had a particularly positive effect on the students who were working with the teacher because they had the same text as everyone else in the class. The class teacher commented that this had a very positive impact on the children's engagement. As the weeks progressed and the students' knowledge and confidence grew, the benefits of the constructivist view of communal knowledge-building was empowered by the whole-class Readers' Circle approach. Students who were confident often began the discussion about their interpretation of the text and the metafictive devices that they had identified. This in turn gave voice to those who in the beginning were a little reticent to express their opinions. By the conclusion of this study, all students were willing and capable of sharing their views about the meaning behind a text and increasingly at a deeper level by looking beyond the surface features and considering the intent of the author. This engagement with the devices was a powerful tool for all students, especially those who had previously struggled with the semantics of a text.

6.2.4 Research Question 4: Does the Expression of a Metalanguage Related to Picturebooks With Metafictive Devices Empower Children's Critically Literate Voice?

The growing development of a metalanguage was a powerful agent in empowering the students to be actively involved in the reading of the text. By

reading, I mean reading the peritext, words and pictures; that is, the complete text. The gradual adding of the language of the devices that the author used gave the students a voice that developed into their critically literate voice. By unlocking the mystery of how and why authors write and giving the students the appropriate terminology that explicitly described the author's intent had the effect of demystifying and empowering the students to express their understanding of the narrative. Expressing their interpretation in the Readers' Circle was tentative at first, but grew in momentum as the study progressed and as the students' vocabulary increased. This gave them the agency to be an active and valuable member of the group that became known as the Book Detectives.

Narratives and especially picturebooks containing metafictive devices are a valuable conduit into an ever-changing and complex world. These texts convey important messages steeped in human emotion and interaction on topics such as the environment, conflict and natural disasters, which proliferate in our world and can be confusing for students. Couched in the format of a picturebook, these complex issues become more relatable for students, and by engaging with the metafictive devices and the metalanguage, the students learn about themselves, others and the bigger picture of their world.

The metalanguage associated with the metafictive devices was especially empowering for the students in the class who were originally reluctant to share their ideas with the whole group. All students were exposed to the metalanguage at the same time, with the same text and with equal status within the group (that is, no student had an easier text, which is the case with basal readers). Therefore, student agency and ownership of opinions, bolstered by the appropriate terminology, developed relatively quickly. Having the correct shared language also meant that students understood their peers' ideas; consequently, meaning was built upon meaning as they built upon each other's responses.

6.3 Reflections on the Study

I commenced this study with the belief that quality literature in the form of quality picturebooks containing metafictive devices could present students with the opportunity to not only enjoy the pleasures of reading but also to develop their critical literacy skills—an important attribute to understand and cope with our uncertain world. I also held the belief that as critical readers, students can co-

construct this understanding through a socio-constructivist approach such as the Readers' Circle format. This joint construction of knowledge is a powerful pedagogic tool because it empowers students to build upon their prior knowledge, the knowledge of others and to hear differing perspectives on multimodal texts that address complex social issues. I also believed that giving students a voice—through the development of an appropriate metalanguage with which to express their interpretation of a text—is a compelling position for the students. This in turn advances their ability to take a critical stance when reading and responding to a text, which is an amplification of the conceptual framework that underpins this study.

Because of the richness of the metafictive devices and underlying messages in the texts selected, students were offered the opportunity to view and understand a perspective of the world in which they live and appreciate that each student's interpretation is valid and varied. In a world facing many environmental and societal challenges, these texts often have as their subject matter these very issues. These safe and accessible texts can inform students within the confines of an age-appropriate narrative while still challenging their own evolving beliefs. Not only are their skills of interpretation developed but their personal view of the world is enriched, becoming part of who they will be as people in our society.

The writings of Freebody and Luke (1990, 1999) emphasised the importance of equipping students with the ability to take a critical stance when reading a text and in this study, a multimodal text. Students need to engage with texts before they can assess the author's point of view and decide whether to agree or disagree; they also need to realise that no text is neutral (Janks, 2019). The roles of critical practices and pragmatic practices were the particular focus of this study. The role of text analyst (or critical practice) evolved through the students' responses in a whole-class adaptation of the Readers' Circle concept (as discussed in Chapter 3). In fact, so pronounced was their evolution as text analysts, that I named the class my Book Detectives. The role of text participant (or pragmatic practice) was demonstrated in the configuration of a whole-class Readers' Circle that gave a voice to each and every student in the class, no matter what level of reading they had previously been assessed at.

6.3.1 Evolution of the Book Detectives as Text Participants

This study was not concerned with the development of the students' written responses but rather the development of a metalanguage to empower them to actively

participate in a Readers' Circle whole-class discussion. The NLG (1996) asserted that metalanguage needs to be malleable and open-ended; teachers and students should be able to use these tools to express their understandings and differences in texts in a new reality. Freebody and Luke (1990, 1999) have referred to the text participant as a reader who questions their use of a text and their participation in it. The theory and conceptual framework underpinning this study was the realisation (like Freebody and Luke) that we need to equip our students not just with basic responses to words but with the ability to critically assess multimodal texts. Students need to be empowered as text participants to fully engage with a text, to comprehend whether or not it is relevant to their lives. Thus, students need to have the central role in deciding what information is relevant to them as a point of personal reference and to realise that the images in a text convey important information, such as the emotions of a character. The importance of prior knowledge of how texts work is an important element of this study, acknowledging the responsibility educators to equip students with this knowledge and the ability to then manipulate this knowledge to shape a personal critical stance to multimodal texts. As indicted above, the students in this study did not assume a dominant role in relation to interpreting a text. However, as the weeks progressed, with greater knowledge of how texts work, their increasing awareness of the voice of the author and the metalanguage at their disposal, the changes were very evident—to myself as well as to the classroom teacher (as evident in the transcripts in Chapters 4 and 5). Even more powerfully, it became evident to the students themselves, as demonstrated by their growing confidence and assertiveness in relation to deciphering the messages within the text.

The students' engagement as a text participant (as well as text analyst) became pronounced in this study as they began to realise that they need to read not only the words but the pictures and interpret their intersection. Berger (1972) wrote of an important distinction between looking and seeing. This distinction focuses on looking at an image where we gain surface information and seeing where we relate a meaning to what we are seeing and offer an interpretation of that image. When this study commenced, the students were looking at images but not seeing their important role in the narrative; in other words, their looking was at a literal level. It was not until they developed the skill of seeing that they realised the important role that the pictures play in the understanding of the author's message. In fact, the students did not really articulate the role of the author; it was as if the author was some hidden

entity that produced books, not a person with a personal agenda that they wished to convey to the reader. This realisation, I believe, humanised the author, making the author's agenda more relatable to the students. Importantly, Berger (1972) stated that 'the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled' (p. 7). This disruption is a feature of multimodal texts containing metafictive devices and was the reason for their inclusion in this study. Vasquez (2020) stated that developing a critical voice can influence decisions and developments for a more just world. Since many of the picturebooks took an environmental or human rights perspective, the students had the opportunity to read with or against the text (Janks, 2019).

We need to educate our students with the skill of reading images; high-quality picturebooks offer this possibility. Educators need to teach students how to interrogate a text because no text is neutral. They also need to develop students' ability to position themselves as powerful readers who question the message being conveyed through word and picture. To do so, as previously stated, they need the ability to read rather than just look at the picture, which with the text, conveys the author's message. This skill then places the students, as text participants, in a powerful position as they personally manipulate the text. This was not the attitude of the students at the beginning of Week 1, but as indicated in Chapters 4 and 5, they assumed a more dominant and confident identity as the study progressed—not only in their understanding of the message through word and image but also in their ability to read the whole text, that is, the peritext as well as the main narrative. This was the reason why I pointed out these features early in the study, to shift the students' perceptions of themselves from being just a receiver of a message to a more powerful position of text analyst and text participant, reflecting critical and pragmatic practices. This development became evident in Week 5 when presented with *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1989). The students readily explored the peritext and while reading, I observed them noting intertextuality, realising that it gave them more information about the narrative. Their ease in handling the text and referring back or forward in the text was now apparent as they assumed a more dominant role. As the classroom teacher stated in Chapter 5, they had become active readers. I was able to probe the meaning of the text using our new metalanguage because *The Tunnel* had quite a subliminal message. Encouragingly, the students took the time to consider the message about the change in the siblings' relationship or rather, the fact

that they could now acknowledge each other and the importance of their feelings for each other.

Other metafictive devices were pointed out to the students; not all have an explicit word that encapsulates what the device is but rather a short description. However, this was overcome by directly relating the devices to a text. *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011) has every device, such as the playful arrangement of images on the page, the breaking of boundaries with not only the illustrations but with the characters seemingly outside the main narrative interjecting from time to time, the use of irony, the changes in font size and style and of course, intertextuality. As previously stated, the students' knowledge of how texts are constructed and the fact that the author has these devices at their disposal to convey a message, was empowering to the students. It gave them a voice and 'insider knowledge' of how texts work. The ability to read pictures was the spark that fuelled their growing engagement with picturebooks. Coupled with their growing vocabulary, the students had the tools necessary to share their reading experiences with each other.

Another vital component in the development of the Book Detectives as active participants was their interaction as a whole class with each other. Originally, I planned to hold smaller groups in a Readers' Circle format with six students at a time. However, I subsequently decided to run the Readers' Circle as a whole class. This change of focus had many beneficial outcomes for all the students. Since this study has at its core a constructivist methodology, the underlying set of beliefs that informed this study was a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which holds that an individual's knowledge and understanding of reality are constructed subjectively. With the whole class being involved, there was a rich sharing of ideas. This began tentatively, but with the development of the metalanguage and growing confidence that all ideas were acceptable, the discussion deepened and was a springboard to other divergent points of view. As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, some of the students shared very individual ideas about the author's intent, which led to a much richer conversation. Students who were deemed to be struggling with their literacy skills were buoyed by an acceptance of their ideas and empowered to take risks in reading the texts and communicating their thoughts. As documented by the class teacher in Chapter 5, these reluctant readers showed growth and importantly, enjoyment in the process.

This change of structure greatly enhanced the students' experiences, leading to the development of a critical stance in a relatively short time span. The pedagogical adaptation of the planned Readers' Circle format was a powerful change strategically because of the multiplicity of voices with different ideas and perspectives building a shared knowledge about the meaning of a shared narrative. As the students' confidence increased and their metalanguage developed, so did their interrogative stance and their understanding that both the images and words played an important role in communicating a message. I do not believe that this richness of shared construction of understanding would have developed so quickly if the students had been working in small isolated groups. Success is infectious and was very evident in this classroom as the excitement grew each week when a new book was introduced. The construction of knowledge and understanding snowballed as the students' ability to express their experiences with the text and their confidence in conveying their interpretations progressed. Some of the texts we explored as a class were challenging for some readers. However, my belief that all the students were readers and the shared development of understanding gave a voice to all the students in this class no matter where they were placed in an assessment regime.

6.4 Enhancement of Book Handling Skills and Complete Text Knowledge

Early in this study, I introduced the students to the various components of a picturebook—the front and back covers, the end papers, the blurb on the back or the inside cover, the dedication, publisher and information on the cover such as the name of the author and illustrator, what it meant if there was only one name and any awards the book had received. I did this quite incidentally, just pointing out these features; I also gave them the metalanguage, saying that these components were called the peritext.

The Tunnel (Browne, 1989) has contrasting end papers; in the beginning of the text, one side of the page is a floral pattern on a wall with a book lying on the floor and the other shows a brick wall. At the end of the text, we see the same walls but this time in front of the brick wall is a book and a football side by side. These end papers denote the change in relationship between the brother and sister in the text. The sister favours books and the brother football. In this case, it magnifies the change in the siblings' relationship. Sipe (2008) stated that children should be taught

that the peritext can contain valuable information about the story. He continued that by not giving students this information or the time to explore the peritext, we are not allowing them to scrutinise the entire text and narrative. While this information was given to the students, as stated in quite an incidental manner, I believe it heightened their awareness of the completeness of a picturebook and all that it contains. I also believe that it aided in developing their respect for this genre and not regard it as a book for younger children. In other words, it empowered the students as readers who were fully aware of the different components of the narrative.

6.5 Influence of Whole-Class Readers' Circle and Joint Construction of Knowledge

The structure of the Readers' Circle was changed from small group to a whole-class approach. I was a little apprehensive at first because of the complexity of interactions with 23 students, which are more difficult to regulate than those with six. My initial trepidation was unfounded because the whole-class approach evolved into a rich platform for discussion and the collaborative construction of understanding. In this study, each comment initially made by the more confident students was a springboard for the less confident students, who felt empowered by the interactions with their peers. In the first session, I explained the rules for whole-class sharing of ideas. I stated that all ideas were welcome and that there were no wrong or right answers because it was a personal response to a text. This statement seemed to alleviate any stress in the class, with the students becoming aware that they could not give the wrong response since it was a personal perspective that was to be valued by the class. I also noticed that students who initially were hesitant to respond grew in confidence when they saw other students' ideas being accepted by the larger group.

This joint construction of knowledge, which is integral to the methodology of this study, gained momentum more quickly than I had imagined. The construction of understanding had a snowball effect on student engagement, their willingness to take risks and contribute the overall fashioning of a shared understanding of meaning without being overly conformist. I actively encouraged the participation of all students and valued all contributions, as evident in Chapter 5. I had initially planned to use stimulus cards to give the students ideas on how to frame their responses. Encouragingly, they were rarely used, even though the students had them on their

desks. As discussed above, the whole-group spring boarding of responses was the entire stimulus that was needed.

Halliday (1975) considered the functions of language and the importance of the development of dialogue. Dialogue, according to Halliday, is the adoption of roles when taking a critical stance. This was demonstrated in this study as the students adopted social roles to express their interpretation of the texts they had read. They showed that they could interact in a socially constructed dialogue, as discussed in Chapter 5, and so the other functions of language that they adopted were bought into play—the correct use of grammar, vocabulary and the appropriate use of questions as well as a metalanguage to express their interpretation of the texts. Bull and Anstey (2019) asserted that classroom talk creates a repository for thoughts and ideas and that all students benefit from hearing the ideas of others. Effective questioning is a strategy that I employed to involve the whole class and was a means of teaching new information to encourage student thinking and sharing. This study used open-ended questions that were not pre-set but arose from the students' reaction and interaction with the text. This is evident in the data presented while the effectiveness is measured by the growing complexity and depth of the students' responses.

Freire (1992) argued that dialogue is an important tool for social change, and he encouraged educators to develop in children a collaborative approach to discussing social issues from a critical standpoint. The picturebooks used in this study offered a wonderful opportunity to develop this critical lens because many dealt with societal issues, whether they be family or community based.

6.6 Empowerment of All Readers

Obviously, the empowerment of all readers is every educator's aim; however, in this study, I was surprised how quickly this occurred. This development, while considered an integral desire in all successful teaching, stood out for me in this study as highly desirable. On reflection, if we empower students as critical thinkers and active text participants, they will gain personal empowerment.

There were some students in this class, as in all classes, who were disengaged from reading because of struggles with their literacy skills or who were generally unmotivated. I found that the class did not appear to have a high regard for picturebooks, believing that they were for students who could not read chapter

books. From the first session, I stated that picturebooks were for everyone—adults and children alike—to dispel any prejudices that they may hold about picturebooks being for less competent readers. As stated above, the joint construction of knowledge gives students a springboard for expanding views in a social setting such as the Readers' Circle. I believe that this led to the personal empowerment of students in this class, encouraging them to tackle texts that had been deemed too difficult for them. The fact that every child had the same text was also a point of pride here for those students who battled with the acquisition of the skills of reading, let alone developing a critical stance. The ability to engage with the images also gave these students information that the words did not. With the development of the metalanguage to express ideas and the level playing ground, I believe that the sense of empowerment grew in all readers since we all began the journey together and much of the information was new to the whole class. Group engagement was infectious, and the enthusiasm built each week as their prowess for decoding the multimodal texts grew. The students were given the autonomy to navigate texts themselves and, as often occurs in these texts, the opportunity to co-author and develop their own critical stance enhanced the students' feeling of empowerment (Pantaleo, 2019). This is precisely what I aimed for in this study—to offer stimulating texts that gave all students the opportunity to open a new dialogue that demonstrated their developing critical stance and participation as a reader.

6.7 Development of Personal Agency

One finding that I was not expecting but which, on reflection, was a natural outcome of this study, was the development in the students (irrespective of their level of literacy) of a personal agency. This was demonstrated by an awareness that they were in control of their reading, understanding and construction of meaning with the whole class in relation to the texts that we explored. Rather than leading the class with a didactic stance, I walked with them on a journey of discovery, unfolding the treasures contained within the literature and developing them as Book Detectives searching for the clues that the author had embedded in the text to tell the narrative. With their increasing proficiency in a metalanguage and their evolving knowledge of the components that make up a narrative, the students were in control of their own reading and interpretation of the message that the narrative contained. As a class, we developed a shared understanding about how texts work. I believe by referring to the

author as one who has the power and use of metafictive devices to tell a story from their perspective was an adjunct in developing that personal agency. The author was not just a name on the cover, and while I did not discuss any in-depth biographies of the authors, I did tell the students about any awards that the author had won and the country that they came from. I did not expect the students to commit these facts to memory but rather to build the image of what and who an author is and their reason for writing. Aware of the importance of relationships between the teacher and students, I walked with the students; I believe that this role as a companion on a journey of discovery added to the development of a personal agency.

Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) cite the work of Devine (2002) in developing identity and belonging upon which social capital is built. They continued that all students should be afforded this power and agency of expression. This is indeed a democratic right. If we are to hear and respond to the voices of students, we need to equip them with the skills to fulfil not only the aims of education but to nurture their ability to express their ideas beyond the literal and into the critical in the safe environment of, first the classroom and later the wider community. In these troubled times, this focus is even more important. Offering students the opportunity to critically engage with texts that often deal with personal and societal issues is imperative in these times. Even if the students have not personally experienced any of the challenges in these picturebooks they are able to read vicariously and form personal views about the scenario that is presented.

I believe all the elements discussed in this chapter led to the emergence of the Book Detectives as text analysts and text participants. This was demonstrated by the development of a personal ownership and awareness of the students' view of themselves as readers. I started with the view that all the students were readers, and all were valued members of the group. I aimed to intervene only when necessary and encouraged the students' voice. The sessions were originally planned to last a maximum of 40 minutes; however, each session continued for at least an hour and only the need to move to another lesson interrupted our sessions. Gombrich (1972) stated that '[r]eading can never be a passive affair' and the active Book Detectives proved this to be correct.

6.8 Power of Story

Students interacting with literature and story can experience ideologies, beliefs and views of other worlds (Sipe, 2008). This interaction, when presented in a multimodal narrative, allows students to view the lives of others. This interaction can expand a student's view of society and the circumstances in which others live. The use of picturebooks containing metafictive devices had a powerful effect on the students in this study, as previously discussed. The power of story was evident in this study. Interestingly, when students read *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010), there were no inappropriate comments from the students when they read that the girl had taken her heart out of her body to protect it from further pain after the death of a loved one. Instead, the students expressed their understanding of the story with great compassion as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> *Student: Just because your heart's broken doesn't mean you have to take all the love out of your heart.*

As indicated in Chapters 4 and 5, insightful responses were evident after all the texts read by the students. However, it was also evident that the complexity of the students' responses developed over the life of this study as the power of the metalanguage, coupled with the whole-class Readers' Circle, gave voice to even those students who had been reluctant to openly share their ideas at the beginning of the study. Sipe (2008) states that story gives the reader the ability to imagine a different story that potentially could transform society to be a place where new values are constructed and new ideas accepted. This is very pertinent in today's world. While this could be seen as beyond the remit of Year 3 students, these challenging yet accessible multimodal texts are a stimulus and building block upon which students begin to develop their own view of their world. This approach can lead the reader to discover new ideas and understandings about an issue. It proved to be a powerful point of reference in this study as students began to realise that the picturebooks containing metafictive devices often bring together unexpected points of view or situations, such as in *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010). *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005) also drew an unusual comparison between the quality of life of a rat and a human, with unexpected conclusions. Thus, the power of story—which was recognised in this study by the change in attitude and response to picturebooks by the students—gives educators a

powerful tool to achieve the aims of the curriculum, offer students the opportunity to assume a cultural position and perhaps most importantly, trigger a love of reading.

6.9 Year 3 Book Detectives

The findings of this study illustrate the powerful improvement in students' engagement with picturebooks containing metafictive devices. The study showed that the learning activities not only stimulated the students' engagement with picturebooks and change their attitude to this genre, but also moved them from literal responses to more thoughtful and insightful ones, necessary for a shift to a critically literate citizen in today's world.

The findings strongly showed that the students progressed from a stance of passive acceptance that they were required to read the text to one of anticipation and excitement. Thus, this study demonstrated that students can be moved from a docile acceptance of a text to that of a Book Detective, scouring the text for clues as to the meaning of the narrative. This extra level of skills in no way impinged on the students' pleasure in reading the text and indeed, only served to enhance their enjoyment. This study did not contain long explanations of the metafictive devices; instead, these were pointed out at an appropriate moment when a text was an exemplar of a particular device.

This study used two critical frameworks, namely, the NLG's Multiliteracies (1996) and Freebody and Luke's Four Resources Model (1990). These clearly gave credibility to the fact that the Australian Curriculum: English can be enacted using this approach to the inclusion of literature. Importantly, the changes in student reading practices give added import to the findings in that the students demonstrated a range of reading practices that not only enhanced their own skills but those of their class members. These outcomes improved the students' critical literacy and importantly, reinforced their view of themselves as readers with a critically literate voice demonstrating their engagement with the skills proposed by TNLG (1996). With their newly acquired understanding of how texts work and the author's intent, the students' practice and attitude to reading picturebooks changed, as is evident from the data discussion, the student dialogue and the class teacher's reflections on the study—that is, the evolution of the Year 3 Book Detectives.

6.10 Implications for Classroom Practice

6.10.1 Why This Study?

This study was undertaken to empower classroom teachers with the knowledge that the aims of a national curriculum must and can be addressed using literature in the classroom. Quality literature covers a wide range of topics and interests for students, offering a lens into their complex and evolving world. Picturebooks, which are suitable for any age, also have a powerful sub-genre—picturebooks with metafictive devices that offer students the opportunity to articulate their understanding of themselves and others in this uncertain world. In this section I will ask and answer questions about any challenges or doubts that teachers may have.

Teachers need the confidence to move away from basal texts, which ostensibly offer a level of security as a safe text to address the requirements of standardised testing. However, these texts are devoid of literary or artistic merit and do not address the aims of the national curriculum in relation to the use of literature to develop not only linguistic skills but to fuel creativity, empathy and the ability to express a critical understanding of a text. Basal readers are written to a formula and with their stilted repetitive language, do not present students with a rich linguistic or creative experience. Their formulaic approach does not promote the skills of critical literacy and offers an artificial view of the world. This study has demonstrated that within a relatively short time span, students offered quality literature quickly begin to articulate understandings using the metalanguage of the genre that were not evident previously, as presented in previous chapters.

6.10.2 Adherence to Curriculum Requirements

The importance of literature is not to be underestimated in today's classrooms or supplanted by commercially produced levelled texts. This study has clearly established that literature is accessible to all students no matter what their deemed level of literacy development. The teaching of literacy needs a strength-based approach; I began this study with the premise that all the students in the Year 3 class were readers and that was the way in which they were viewed throughout the study. I did not inquire into their status in the realms of assessment. The strength of using literature lies in the ability it gives the reader to share a new view of society and to ignite a personal schema of how society should function. Literature is approached differently by each reader, which makes it suitable for all students. Indeed, this is

recognised in the Australian Curriculum: English as the following excerpts from ACARA (2019c) demonstrate:

> Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read, view and interpret spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade.
>
> Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways and speculate on the author's reasons (ACELT1594)
>
> Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts and share responses with others (ACELT1596)
>
> Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative (ACELT1599)
>
> Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the reader's reaction, including rhythm and onomatopoeia in poetry and prose (ACELT1600).

The engagement with the above material is evident in this study and has not been viewed through a mandatory and imposed regime, but rather an opportunity for teachers to enrich their classroom practice by using high-quality picturebooks containing metafictive devices. These devices equip students with not only the ability to develop a critical stance but offer meaning-making as a collaborative group. Just as importantly, they inspire a love of literature, in line with the aims of UNESCO (2020), which states that children need the opportunity to develop as tolerant and compassionate citizens of the world. This engagement evolved naturally as the students' ability to engage with the metafictive devices developed, together with the metalanguage to express their growing understanding of the author's message. The development critical literacy using multimodal texts containing metafictive devices offers educators an opportunity to bridge that gap between skills development focused solely on assessment-driven directives, and a connection with real life. The texts in this study provided a view on life and acted as a catalyst for rich and stimulating class discussions that addressed the aims of ACARA (n.d.).

Students need the opportunity to make connections with their world; these could be as focused as their classroom or have a wider outlook on the society in which the student lives. Literature offers this opportunity and the critical literacy skills developed from picturebooks with metafictive devices can then be transferred

to other texts such as media, maps, graphs and others. Simply teaching students the mechanical skills of reading is not sufficient; students need something stimulating to read, something to spark their imagination and encourage them to develop empathy for others in their world, which is facing multiple challenges, especially in today's uncertain times. This study has reinforced these perspectives and demonstrated that even students who have struggled with the acquisition of literacy skills can still be enchanted with quality picturebooks such as those that were used in this study. By empowering all students with an understanding of the devices that authors use to impart their message, the students felt confident to express their own opinion, whether it be affirmative or negative in relation to the author's intent.

6.10.3 Picturebooks in Uncertain Times

All the students in this study embraced these texts no matter what their previous text level was deemed to be. Picturebooks containing metafictive devices empowered the students, even those who did not know every word. They gained meaning at a critical level, which is what reading is—making meaning from texts, not just parroting lexical chains of words. Armed with these skills, all students can then employ their critically literate voice to develop their own worldview. As they mature, students will have the skills to make informed and ethical choices when it comes to social and personal viewpoints and demonstrate their ability to understand the semiotics involved in not only reading, but critically understanding their multimodal world.

Dialogue coupled with the metalanguage gave the students the agency to be an active and successful member of the Readers' Circle of Book Detectives. The Readers' Circle format, which is familiar to most educators, is a powerful and cooperative way for students to construct meaning. Another benefit of using a whole-class model was that all students had an opportunity to contribute and all students benefited from other students' perspective, so the constructivist approach was enhanced using this whole-class model. A smaller group version could also be engaged after the whole class session to refine the skills and learnings from the larger group and examine the text at an even greater micro level without detracting from the literature.

6.10.4 Is There Varied Content in These Texts or is it All Just Fantasy?

As there is a proliferation of quality picturebooks containing metafictive devices, educators are offered a wide range of topic and age-appropriate literature for

all ages, from children beginning their school career to those about to complete their formal schooling. The scope of topics in this sub-genre also invites all students to become critical readers, in control of their own learning and literary development. These texts situate the students to achieve the aims and capabilities of a national curriculum and foster a love of literature and learning. Because of the multimodal nature of these picturebooks, all student learning preferences and skill levels are catered for. These texts also span many subject areas such as history, science and personal development.

6.11 Where to Next for Teachers and Students in Uncertain Times?

This study showed the powerful influence of picturebooks in supporting students' knowledge and understanding of the world around them, but further research is needed to develop more sustainable practices. Such research must involve different sectors in education. Many curricula across the globe point to the importance of students learning crucially literate skills to become informed citizens. In Australia, the national curriculum has placed an emphasis on the use of quality literature in the classroom as a vehicle to enhance students' global citizenship. However, much research shows that quality literature is not fully present in every classroom nor is it inadequately used to develop students' critical capacities, which poses its own set of tensions.

In these uncertain times, students need to be equipped with the skills to critically engage with multimodal texts that offer opportunities to be able to understand that authors write with the intent to influence. When these skills mature, students can then apply these skills to modes of communication that bombard our screens to decide what is real and what fits with their personal view of living. There are opportunities for improvement within higher education contexts and teacher education. The training of pre-service teachers to fully realise the potential of quality literature to develop the critically literate voice of their students is paramount. This can be achieved through carefully designing courses that contain quality children's literature and the implications for its use in classrooms. In-service for classroom teachers also needs to be developed so that programs can be offered within schools. These should adopt a whole-school approach to developing and tracking critical literacy. Such programs would then offer opportunities for further research on the effect of using these picturebooks in all grades across schooling.

As schools focus their programs on success in national testing, the perceived safe practice is to use structured basal readers that supposedly teach a set of question, response skills and drills. However, these texts do not contain the same characteristics as quality literature, nor do they have the depth to develop students' ability to interrogate a text at a critical level. This study has demonstrated that not only can these skills be developed, but also that this can be achieved without compromising the joy of reading. Figure 6.1 is a visual representation of the evolution of the Year 3 Book Detectives and offers a pedagogical framework for teachers to develop their own Book Detectives.

Figure 6.1

A Pedagogical Framework For Teaching Critical Literacy Using Picturebooks That Contain Metafictive Devices.
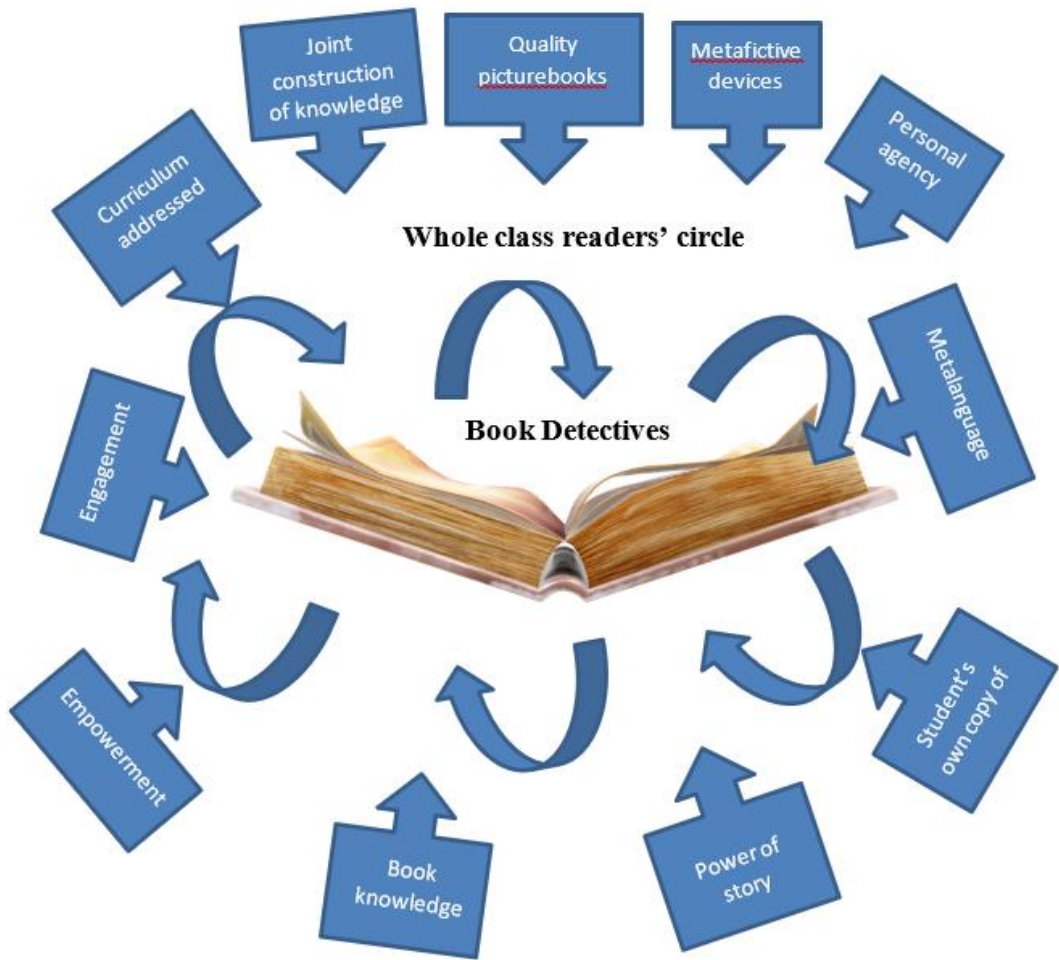
6.12 Limitations of This Study

This study had a number of limitations:

- This study was a small sample but embraced an innovative approach to whole-class Readers' Circle.
- The study was limited to one class.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on literature in pre-service teacher education and in-service education for teachers.
- A disadvantage of semi-structured individual interviews is that the participants (in this case, the class teacher) could provide 'filtered' responses; that is, what they perceive the researcher wants to hear (Creswell, 2014). This did, in fact, occur in the initial interview. I was aware of this possibility and for this reason, I accepted the teacher's preference to write a concluding statement at the end of the study. This ensured that the teacher understood that there were no right or wrong answers and that the teacher's thoughts about literacy teaching and learning were genuinely valued.

6.13 Conclusion

The findings of this study unequivocally show that the students' engagement with picturebooks containing metafictive devices not only stimulated their engagement with picturebooks and changed their attitude to this genre but also moved them from offering literal responses to sharing more thoughtful and insightful responses, a vital skill in today's troubling world. The students moved from a place of acceptance where they were required to read the text to one of anticipation and excitement, which earned the students the title of Year 3 Book Detectives. Gone was the passive acceptance of the first week of the study to a curiosity and eagerness to see the devices that the author had used. Also, the acknowledgement of the author as someone who was trying to influence the reader with a certain perspective.

This study has also confirmed that literature and, in this case, picturebooks containing metafictive devices, have the capacity to teach students strategies for thinking about literature and reading literature as opposed to isolated skills such as 'skills and drills' worksheets or basal readers.

Further, the study has shown that students can be moved from a docile acceptance of a text to the role of a Book Detective, scouring the text for clues as to

the meaning of the narrative. This micro level of skills in no way impinged on the students' pleasure in reading the text and in fact, was a point of enhancement. The realisation that these picturebooks contained two modes of communication and employed the use of a semiotic system to convey meaning was another empowering learning for these students. As we live in an ever-increasing multimodal world with societal and environmental challenges these skills of being able to interpret the visual and the written are imperative for students continued success in their world.

Importantly, the study demonstrated the development of book handling skills and book knowledge in the students through discussions of peritext. These newly acquired reading practices not only enhanced their own skills but also those of their fellow classmates. These outcomes amplified the students' ability to become critically literate and reinforced their view of themselves as readers. With newly developed skills in understanding how texts work, the devices they contain and the authors intent their practice and attitude to reading picturebooks changed as is evident from the data discussion, student dialogue and the class teacher's reflection on this study.

I was privileged to walk beside the Year 3 students in this study as they evolved through carefully scaffolded support such as the Readers' Circle, the development of a metalanguage and interaction with quality literature. This study clearly demonstrated that there is an opportunity for all young learners to benefit from these pedagogical approaches and literature and become Book Detectives—empowered and critically literate citizens of the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Genre	A term used to differentiate different categories of literary works (Latrobe et al., 2002)
Indeterminacy	Something that is undefined (Pantaleo, 2014)
Intertextuality	Connections between texts, illustrations, cultural knowledge and artefacts (Pantaleo, 2014; Sipe & McGuire, 2008)
Metafictive device	Inherent devices such as parody, which are a characteristic of a postmodern picturebooks, or devices that may distance the reader from the text (Pantaleo 2014)
Mise-en-abyme	A picture within a picture (Pantaleo 2014)
Multiliteracies	Evolving multiplicity of modes of communication (e.g. text, digital texts, music, sound, still and moving images; NLG, 1996)
Parody	An amusing imitation of a familiar piece of writing (Latrobe et al., 2002)
Picturebook	A term that encompasses children's literature where the words and pictures are interdependent (Latrobe et al., 2002)
Postmodernism	Changes that have occurred in philosophy, literature, art architecture and music during the second half of the 20th century (Sipe & Pantaleo, 2008)
Postmodern picturebook	A picturebook that contains more than two of the metafictive devices inherent in postmodern picturebooks, such as parody, irony or self-referentiality (Sipe & McGuire, 2008)

Appendix B: Journal of Each Session With the Year 3 Book Detectives

29.1.19

I met with the teacher and we went through the study in more detail. Initially her role was to note the number of times the students referred to the metafictive devices in the book they were reading on a checklist. The teacher said she would allocate the children to certain table groups and we arranged for me to come to class and meet the children and tell them a little about the Readers' Circle experience we were to share. There are 23 students in the class, and I have enough copies of each text for every child to have their own copy. The teacher said she was looking forward to learning from me, but I replied that we would learn from each other. I then recorded an interview with the teacher.

The Adventure Begins

6.2.19

Today I met the students, 23 eager Year 3s. I introduced myself and shared my career in education with them. The students were impressed that not only was I a teacher but that I teach people who want to be teachers. I explained the research study to them and their important role in this study. The permission letters were distributed, and I concluded the meeting by reading them Fox *(Wild, 2004). The students listened closely to the book and a few students made a comment about the story. Only three students made a comment at an insightful level; the rest accepted the story at face value.*

14.2.19

Week 1 of the study: *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005).

While I was not nervous, I was a little anxious about how the lesson would unfold, especially taking a whole-class approach to the Readers' Circle, also the fact that this was not my class. I need not have worried; the students were keen to accept me and participate in the lesson. The teacher stated previously that they had learned about making connections with a text and predicting

what the text would be about, but at this stage that application was not evident. A few questions were asked about the cover of the text and the students began to read. A few students took their time and studied the illustrations, but most just quickly flicked through the pages. When the reading was complete, they were free to comment. Most comments were of a literal nature; the students commented that the book was about being happy with who you are, no one commented about greed or why there were many hyphenated sentences.

I did not go into any lengthy explanations as we were going to revisit this text at the conclusion of the study. When asked did the text need illustrations, they agreed that it did so you could understand, but that was the extent of the discussion. The most interesting discussion centered around the famous paintings referenced in the illustrations, however, only a few children recognised that they were famous paintings, so the fact that they were altered did not have an impact on the class as a whole.

I then explained what intertextuality was and that it was a device authors used to tell the story. One student knew what 'inter' meant and another picked up on the word 'text'. No one commented that the illustrations were part of the text and that you had to read them. One student was pleased with the name as his name was also Riley.

I showed the class next week's book, The Three Pigs *(Wiesner, 2001). No one had read this version.*

21.2.19
Week 2 of the study: *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001)
Today we slipped into a routine and the class was very enthusiastic. I decided to use the prompt cards to give the students ideas for asking questions and responding to the texts. I shared with students about reading a picturebook, that you read the words and the pictures as they depend on each other to tell the story. I noticed during this reading that some students returned to the text when they had finished reading to check the words and pictures to work out meaning. After the students had completed reading the text, I asked for any comments and these were recorded. They seem very at ease with the voice recorder, so I am pleased I did not video the sessions as it could have

inhibited their responses. I asked the students to choose a prompt card; this led to a discussion about the protagonist. Most comments were fairly literal, however, I could see that some were searching through the book for more information. I asked if they remembered from last week what we call a text within a text. One student said 'intertext'... that was exciting! The whole class then proceeded to see how many examples of intertextuality they could find in the book. This was a turning point as the students enjoyed searching through the book for examples and I could see that they were beginning to realise that just reading the book once and moving to the next book was not as exciting as looking for clues and interrogating a text. Next, we discussed irony and what it looked like in a text. They had not heard this term before but seemed to understand the concept and look for examples within the text. The sessions were planned for 30 to 40 minutes, but I was wrapping up the lesson after an hour and still some students wanted to make further comments. I am looking forward to next week.

1.3.19

Week 3: *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983)

At each session they greet me and take my bag to quickly distribute the resources. Today was a Red-Letter Day! I can see a shift in the students reading of the texts. Today's session went for over an hour and the students were fully engaged. At the end of the session, the classroom teacher said that she couldn't believe the change in the way they were reading the texts. They were reading back after they finished and checking ideas and clues to the message in the story, so they were not just reading at face value but delving into the text. The majority of the class could recall what intertextuality was and actively looked for examples without being prompted. One student made the connections between the gorilla, New York and King Kong. The students were able to articulate the message contained within the text that Hannah just wanted to be closer to her father. No one could explain the silences in the text, the fact that no mother was mentioned but eventually they understood Browne's approach, that there were gaps in the story for the reader to become a co-author. We discussed the use of framing and colour and the way Browne portrayed Hannah's feelings of isolation. They are beginning to

move from the literal to the critical level in their responses and in the way, they read the text.

8.3.19

Week 4: *No Bears* (McKinlay, 2011)

Well…it was exciting to be greeted with such enthusiasm by the class and the teacher. The class teacher said that the children were checking that I was coming because I had a book containing a lot irony! During the week they had been looking in other books in their classroom for examples of intertextuality. The shift from last week has gained momentum, with the class eager to begin reading and as they read, I observed them reading the pictures as well as the words. Early in the sessions, I explained to the students that every part of a picturebook is important and part of the overall story. I had told them about the end papers, the cover and how they could work out if the author and illustrator were the same person or not. I discussed the blurb on the back or inside cover, the publisher and information about the author and if the book had won any awards. I was observing the students as they waited for all the books to be distributed discussing the cover, end papers and other elements to see if there were any clues about the content of the story. I also noticed that when they completed reading, they would go back to these elements of the text to check for additional information or confirm what they thought. This is a very impressive shift in their book handling skills. I noticed some children making notes on the supplied paper; I was going to stop them and tell them just to enjoy reading but I decided not to interfere. There was a stillness and silence in the room as they read, which demonstrated their absorption in the text.

After they had completed reading the first time, I was going to speak to the class, however, I noticed they were going back and re-reading and checking information in the text, so I decided to wait. I only interrupted when they had had a chance to interact with each other. They had found many examples of intertextuality without any instruction from me and picked up the irony of the title as the text is full of bears. One student decided that he was a true detective! I decided that they were all Book Detectives. It was heartening to see the students' excitement as they engaged with this picturebook.

Interestingly, when I pointed out the playful nature of the text, they began to notice the changes in fonts throughout the text and the unusual placement of the text on the page. I have not had to use the prompt cards to stimulate conversation, so they just sit untouched on each desk. The teacher was not comfortable with using the checklist as I had planned, and I have abandoned it myself as the students are demonstrating a high degree of engagement with the metafictive devices, which is demonstrated by their responses. The teacher has morphed into one of the students and sits at a table with two students who find reading challenging; these students came up to me and told me they love this book. I found that this week, I had minimal intervention compared with previous weeks as the students were taking over the running of the sessions, from distributing resources, reading independently, beginning their own table discussions and noting any interesting ideas down on paper.

15.3.19

Week 5: *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1989)

It is amazing the excitement that a picturebook can create in a classroom. The whole class is totally focused and engaged, even the two students who were deemed strugglers and were not fully engaged at the beginning of these sessions. While my helper was distributing the books, I again observed the students as they examined the front cover carefully, noted that we had read another book by Anthony Browne, they then turned to the back cover and read the blurb and then inspected the end papers. The end papers in this text are quite significant. As I looked around the room, every student was fully engaged in their reading of the words and pictures in the text. When they had completed the first reading, they went back to the beginning and started discussing the text with their table members. The excitement in the room was palpable as the students made more discoveries in the illustrations. I was again reluctant to interrupt their discussions, but we only had an hour… I never imagined at the beginning of this study that they would work for such long sessions. The only reason we stopped after an hour was because they had a lesson with the PE teacher. The comparison to Week 1 is striking. The prompt cards lie abandoned in the folders; however, I did notice a few students refer to them before we began our whole-class sharing. I was very

pleased with their responses when I asked about the significance of the end papers. They expressed that the end papers showed a shift in the siblings' relationship. We discussed the page where the brother is turned to stone and by the sister hugging him, he returned to normal. One student commented that it demonstrated the power of love and that was what saved the brother… no literal response here! I am again looking forward to the next session.

22.3.19

Week 6: *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (Thompson, 2008)

It was again heartening to be greeted so warmly by the students and class teacher. The books were distributed as usual and I overheard two students discussing end papers. They all read quietly once again and after the first reading, were asking each other questions about the text. The mood in the room was quite subdued, which reflects the content of the text. They later shared how sad they felt when reading the book but that the situation changed for the better. We were able to discuss how Thompson uses space and place to create various feelings within the book. During this study I have attempted to talk about the author and the author's intent so that the students can identify that the author is a person with their own ideas and beliefs. This is adding to our discussions as the author now has an identity and is present within the book.

The students are very focused on their reading and keen to share and only need the occasional prompting from me to direct the conversation. They were able to capture the mood of this text and shared how the adopting a dog with three legs changed the life of George and his grandmother. One student was very excited and stated that he had found intertextuality… the newspaper that had been used to make the dog a papier mâché leg had a reference to Harry Potter! Continuing with ticks on the checklist is redundant as the students are constantly referring to the metafictive devices. The development of the metalanguage to express their ideas about the various texts is a powerful skill that the students have acquired.

29.3.19

Week 7: *The Singing Hat* (Riddle, 2000)

I took a risk this week with introducing The Singing Hat *(Riddle, 2000) as it is quite a complex book, however, I am curious to see how the students will view this text. My fears were groundless as they were very engaged in their reading although after they had completed their reading, it took a number of questions to move beyond the literal meaning in the text. The room was very quiet when the students were reading as this text has more words than our previous texts. We began to unpack the meaning of the text after we had discussed a few challenging words. One student began by commenting on Colin Jenkins caring for the rare birds even though it eventually cost him his job and his home. This prompted a discussion about the environment and how they admired the main character because he did not think about himself. One student commented that you should not judge people by how they look. There was a discussion around the importance of reading the pictures and they hunted through the book to find examples to illustrate this importance as the words do not always say what the pictures depict and the reverse. The teacher again commented on the change in the students' reading habits. They not only read the book but explored and interrogated the whole text. An interesting discussion followed on the different techniques Riddle used in the illustrations including the use of photographs and collage. One student commented that the important person on each page stood out because of the techniques used. The discussions with this class have become richer and more complex each week. There will now be a four-week break in the study for school holidays and public holidays.*

3.5.19

Week 8: *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010)

I was interested if the students would continue in the same fashion as last term as it has been four weeks since I worked with them and I have quite a challenging book for them to read. My concerns were groundless as they were just as enthusiastic as if this was my class. I would have shared this book later in the year, but I only have two terms to work with the students. They all stated that they were glad I came back! Before the students began

reading, we again discussed the devices authors use to tell a story and shared a point of view. The students were keen to begin reading and slipped back into their routine and examined the cover, back and end papers before reading. This text will require guided questioning to help unpack the complex issues in the story. I noticed when they had completed their reading some puzzled faces, so they began looking back through the text to clarify what was puzzling them, the Book Detectives in action!

The whole class discussion began at a steady pace with some quite literal ideas being expressed, but the power of the group emerged with some children's comments stimulating others and giving them the confidence to say something that appeared to be different. Some of the comments were very moving. One student stated that the girl had to put her heart in a bottle to protect it because it had broken because someone she loved had died. The students are becoming quite as ease with books that slowly reveal themselves. The enthusiasm and acceptance of a challenge to interrogate a text is quite inspiring to myself as an educator as is their engagement for long periods of time, especially for this age group.

10.5.19

Week 9: *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000)

I again took a calculated risk with another complex text. We began the session by discussing the devices authors use to tell a story; they discussed intertextuality, irony, the use of fonts, placement and signs and symbols and why these devices worked. The students were very interested in the end papers in this text and this exploration of the peritext has become a natural way to begin reading a text. They read quietly and were absorbed in the book as it is a complicated text in terms of layout, illustrations and meaning. When they had completed reading, I asked if they could tell me what the story was about. They said it was about a large red thing that could not find its home… quite a literal answer. But as is their practice, the more we talked, the deeper the conversation became. Then they began to share that no matter what you look like everyone should have a home and a place where they belong. They were intrigued by Tan's use of his father's architectural drawings as a background on each page, also the use of framing was discussed and what

effect this had on the telling of the story. As they are accustomed to reading the pictures, they were interested in the use of arrows and signs within the text and they are actively reading the pictures without prompting. Without instruction many of the students began re-reading the book after our discussion and the rest followed.

17.5.19

Week 10: *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (Thompson, 2005)
Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end! Today was my last day with the Book Detectives and was a wonderful celebration of literature. We revisited the first book that we shared and the metamorphosis that has occurred with these students is exciting. Reading picturebooks is not treated with disdain as was in the beginning and they have demonstrated the ability to read quite complex texts and openly share their understandings without fear of someone criticising their interpretation. They are demonstrating an ability to interrogate a text and are reading the words and the pictures. They listed the devices they now looked for and today I discussed self-referentiality, but I used the term self-connection as they knew what that meant. They were eager to read this text again with new eyes and armed with the metalanguage with which to express their ideas.

Unlike last time, they were intrigued by the altered portraits and the use of hyphenated sentences for exaggeration. Their understanding of the message in Riley was expressed as the fact that we don't need a profusion of material possessions to be happy. They discussed the devices Thompson used to give us that message.

If this was my class, I would have treated this book later in the year, however, the students were fully engaged in the text and did not see it as an inconvenience to read the text again as this time they felt empowered to tackle the complexity and knew that they were in a safe place to share their ideas. The power of the whole-class approach has been very successful and the fact that each child had a copy of the same book made a great deal of difference to all the readers, especially the ones who struggled with reading as they were part of whole-class discussions and did not need to have a simpler text to accommodate their perceived needs.

Two comments stay with me after these sessions with the Book Detectives. One student thanked me for teaching her how to read pictures and one student stated that he did not like books until I showed him how to read them—the power of great literature!

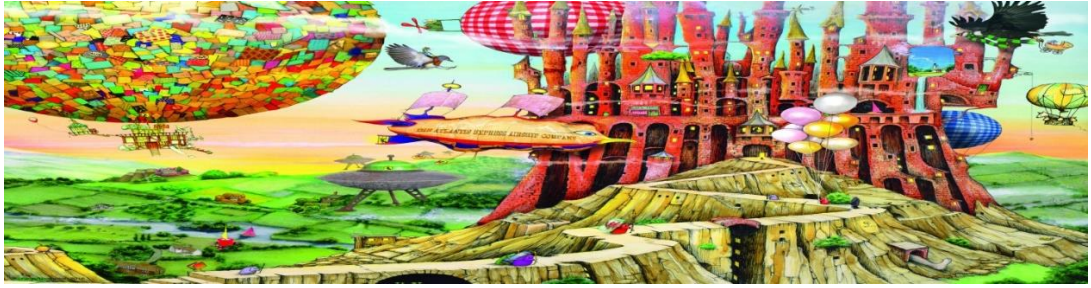# How does this text impact the way you see the world?

Have you met anyone like the characters in this text?

Can you tell us something about the author's intent in writing this text?

What effect does the protagonist have on the other characters in the text?

What message did you receive when

reading this book?