

Paths to Interpretation: Developing Students' Interpretive Repertoires

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Abstract

Literacy educators need to develop children's repertoire of reading strategies beyond the decoding of written language to address the visual images and graphic design features found in contemporary picturebooks if they are to become successful readers. The qualitative case study reported here was designed to investigate the instructional approaches used to support the development of intermediate grade students' interpretive strategies for comprehending the visual and design features of multimodal texts. By focusing on the classroom teacher's instructional moves and students' responses, this study asserts there were several paths to interpretation that supported students' comprehension of these texts.

Multimodal texts or *ensembles*, in particular contemporary and postmodern picturebooks, present challenges to readers as they work across the multiple meaning systems inherent in these texts to construct meaning (Jewitt, 2006; Serafini, 2014). As Siegel (2006) notes, "language arts education can no longer ignore the way that our social, cultural, and economic worlds now require facility with texts and practices involving the full range of representational modes" (p. 65). Research on how to support students' development of a range of interpretive strategies to approach and interpret the visual images and graphic design elements in multimodal ensembles is essential as the texts students encounter grow more complex.

This paper focuses on a research study designed to investigate how a particular classroom teacher supported the development of students' interpretive strategies for responding to the multimodal aspects of selected contemporary and postmodern picturebooks (Sipe & Pantaleo, 2008), in particular the work of award winning children's author-illustrator Anthony Browne. Postmodern picturebooks often contain non-linear plots, polyphonic narrators, intertextual references, a blending of genres, and indeterminacies (McCallum, 1996). Goldstone (2004) suggests postmodern picturebooks be viewed as a new genre, one that contains a sense of irony, contradictions in the relationship between text and image, and the uncovering of the artistic process of book making. These features of postmodern picturebooks requires the reader to approach these texts in new ways, paying close attention to the ways that authors and illustrators play with the traditional picturebook elements, format, and design.

Research on Students' Responses to Picturebooks

Trying to understand how readers read, respond, and interpret the texts encountered in classroom settings, in particular contemporary children's picturebooks, has an extensive history in literacy education and research (Galda & Beach, 2001; Marshall, 2000; Sipe, 1999). Using various theoretical frameworks for investigating the

ways in which students construct meaning with multimodal texts, researchers have begun to expand their vision of what it means to be literate and to endorse the significant role that visual literacy plays in contemporary classrooms (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Callow, 1999; Pantaleo, 2008; Serafini, 2010).

The discussions associated with picturebooks and other multimodal ensembles provide children the opportunity to engage in an unending process of meaning making, as every rereading and revisiting of a text brings new ways of looking at written language, visual images, and design elements (Myhill, Jones, & Hopper, 2006; Serafini & Ladd, 2008). Readers oscillate back and forth among the sign systems during the reading of picturebooks and, "...the total effect depends not only on the unison of the text and illustrations, but also on the perceived interaction or transaction between the two" (Sipe, 1998, p. 98). As readers encounter visual images and graphic design elements in addition to the written language presented in contemporary picturebooks, the repertoire of strategies students need to draw upon must expand to deal with the aspects of these texts beyond decoding of written language (Pantaleo, 1995, 2004b; Serafini, 2010).

Picturebooks as Multimodal Ensembles

The picturebook is a multimodal ensemble where meaning is generated simultaneously by the reader in transaction with written text, design elements, and visual images (Serafini, 2014). Multimodal ensembles are print-based and digital texts that utilize more than one mode or semiotic resource to represent meaning potentials, where mode is defined as a socioculturally shaped resource for meaning making (Kress, 2010). Readers are confronted with texts that include visual images and a variety of graphic design elements in their everyday lives with greater frequency than texts that exclusively contain written language (Fleckenstein, 2002). Images and texts are being combined in unique ways, and readers in today's world need new skills and strategies for constructing meaning in transaction with these multimodal texts as they are encountered during the sociocultural practices of interpretation and analysis (Pantaleo, 2008). As the *medium of the page* turns to the *medium of the screen*, the complexity of the texts children encounter will only grow more complex, and as such so will the repertoire of strategies young readers will need to comprehend them.

Review of Research on Reading Strategy Instruction

There has been a call for understanding how readers construct in transaction with children's literature for many years (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Meek, 1988). Rosenblatt (1978) suggests, "a better understanding of how children 'learn to mean' in specific contexts should yield signals for those involved in all aspects of reading, especially research on response to literature and the teaching of literature" (p. 41). However, some researchers and theorists (Beach, 1993; Lewis, 2000) assert that the limited perspective of reader response theories that focus primarily on the reader as an autonomous constructor of meaning and minimizes the importance of the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the construction of meanings in response to literature is problematic.

A significant amount of research conducted on effective reading comprehension strategies has focused on the cognitive operations readers employ when reading to construct meaning in transactions with texts (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Pressley, 2000; Pressley, Block, & Gambrell, 2002). This

research has provided educators with a list of comprehension strategies that proficient readers have identified as ones they use to comprehend texts. This list generally includes; summarizing, predicting, inferring, monitoring comprehension, visualizing, asking questions, and making connections. These strategies have been referred to as “goal-directed cognitive operations” that are taught through teacher directed instruction (Sinatra, Brown, & Reynolds, 2002).

Reading comprehension, that is, the construction of meaning in transaction with texts, is inextricably linked to the immediate and socio-cultural contexts of the reading event. In other words, comprehension strategies must always take into account the reader, the text itself, the task or activity, and the context of the reading event (Dalton & Proctor, 2008; Hammerberg, 2004; Serafini, 2012). What this means for reading teachers is that comprehension strategies should not be taught in isolation, as universally applicable cognitive operations that disregard the context of the reading event, the reader’s purpose for reading, the text being read, and what is expected of the reader after their reading is completed. The use of reading or interpretive strategies is contextualized, meaning the use of particular strategies depends on what is being read and asked of the reader. With an increasing focus on comprehension instruction, teachers need to consider how the various reading strategies they are demonstrating in their reading workshops serve the primary goal of supporting readers’ construction of meaning in transactions with multimodal ensembles.

Studies of children’s responses to the written text and visual images contained in contemporary picturebooks has demonstrated the ability of young readers to derive meaning in transaction with a variety of texts (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; McClay, 2000; Pantaleo, 2004a). In addition, research focusing on students’ responses and transactions with contemporary and postmodern picturebooks has described how readers approach the visual and textual components, graphic design features, and construct symbolic connections between the story-worlds presented in picturebooks and students’ own experiences (Anstey, 2002; Pantaleo, 2004b; Serafini, 2005).

Research Design

The study reported here was designed to investigate the instructional approaches used to support the development of students’ interpretive strategies for comprehending the visual images and graphic design features of multimodal ensembles, in particular contemporary and postmodern picturebooks. An analysis of the discussions, interactions, and instructional approaches associated with read alouds and discussions of various postmodern picturebooks, in particular the work of Anthony Browne, was used to explore the teacher *pedagogical moves* utilized by a third grade teacher, and the *interpretive moves* utilized by third grade readers.

Interpretivist research is designed to understand the meaning perspectives of the participants as they interact in their local contexts (Erickson, 1986). Data sources included field notes, transcripts of classroom discussions, interviews, student reading response notebooks, classroom charts, and a reflective notebooks kept by the classroom teacher and shared with the researcher regularly throughout the study. The credibility and trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by member checks, triangulation of data sources, the use of analytic memos, and the analysis of disconfirming data (Erickson, 1986).

In order to better understand how readers responded to the visual images and design features in *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2001), the picturebook was *disrupted* (Serafini, 2005) that is, experienced in four different ways. First, the picturebook was initially read aloud as a picturebook, where the teacher shared the book as a whole during the reading of it. Next, the illustrations from the picturebook were displayed as a visual storyboard along a wall of the classroom, organized by the four voices in the story. Then, the story was typed up and presented as a written text separated from the accompanying illustrations. Finally, the story was typed up in four separate “voices” that corresponded to the story design and used as a script for readers’ theater. The disruption of the picturebook *Voices in the Park* allowed the teacher and students to focus on the different modalities featured in this award-winning picturebook and provided a foundation for the deeper exploration of subsequent picturebooks in a unit of study focusing on contemporary and postmodern picturebooks.

By disrupting the ways in which *Voices in the Park* was presented to students, the researcher hoped to better understand how readers constructed meaning with written text, visual images, and design features and the interplay between these various components. Other contemporary and postmodern picturebooks, including several by Anthony Browne, were subsequently shared and discussed to allow students to apply various reading and interpretive strategies to an array of multimodal ensembles throughout the unit. Research questions that directed the data collection and analysis for this project included the following:

1. What types of responses and meanings did young readers construct during their transactions with various textual, visual, and design features of contemporary picturebooks?
2. How did the various instructional approaches used during classroom discussions support students’ development of strategies for understanding and analyzing contemporary picturebooks?

The setting for this study was a third grade classroom in a public elementary school in the Southwestern United States. The site was selected based on access to the school and previous relationships established between the researcher and the school principal. With the assumption that researchers want to understand and gain insight from a particular setting and population, participants in this study were selected via purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). The school is generally considered a progressive institution that utilizes workshop models of reading and writing instruction (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 2001; Serafini & Youngs, 2006) and children’s literature is utilized throughout the curriculum.

In the classroom selected for this study, there were twenty-nine students, thirteen boys and sixteen girls. The students were Hispanic (nine) and Caucasian (twenty) and primarily of middle-class socio-economic status. All students’ first language was English. The students test scores revealed most students were considered average and above average readers, with several qualifying for assistance in reading instruction. The classroom teacher had been teaching third grade for approximately nine years and was considered by her peers and the administration to be an excellent teacher.

In the classroom being investigated, picturebooks had been used primarily to support writing instruction as mentor texts (Ray, 1999) and in the content areas of social studies and science. Although picturebooks were included in the classroom library, the teacher shared with the researcher during an initial interview that picturebooks had not been used as a component of their reading instruction. She had been focusing primarily on novels during the reading workshop up to that point in the year. Lessons used to support students' comprehension of texts were conducted almost exclusively with novels and other longer texts. In this way, students were familiar with picturebooks as an independent reading option, but had not spent time in class discussing them as a particular literary genre or format.

Data Analysis and Collection

The data analysis procedures used in this study were consistent with an interpretivist model of qualitative research. According to Erickson (1986), "the basic task of data analysis is to generate assertions that vary in scope and level of inference, largely through induction, and to establish an evidentiary warrant for the assertions one wishes to make" (p. 146). Utilizing a constant comparative analysis of the data being collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), discussion transcripts, field notes, artifacts, and reflective journal entries were read as they were generated and again at the end of the data collection period. Theoretical memos were generated to organize possible assertions and lines of analysis. The three-step process of open coding, axial coding and selected coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was conducted to construct assertions and understand the relationships among various sets of the data corpus.

Over the course of seven weeks, thirty-three classroom lessons and ensuing discussions were recorded. In addition to the lessons and discussions directly observed by the researchers, the classroom teacher recorded all the literature discussions and mini-lessons that occurred when the researchers were not in attendance. Field notes, teacher reflective journals, student group interviews, students' written reflections, a student created, multimodal poster, and group discussions were transcribed and made available for data analysis.

Data was initially open-coded and the following initial categories were constructed to organize the data corpus: pedagogical moves, conversational moves, and interpretive moves. For purposes of this analysis, the conversational moves, defined here as ways of entering, moving within, and exiting various classroom conversations have been previously addressed by other researchers (Cazden, 2001; Myhill et al., 2006; Nystrand, 1997; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) and were not the focus of this particular analysis.

The primary focus of the data analysis for this study was on the interpretive moves—the interpretive processes, paths, and perspectives revealed by the comments and responses made by students during the classroom discussions and activities, and the pedagogical moves utilized by the classroom teacher—the instructional choices made by the classroom teacher before, during, and after the classroom discussions that supported students' development of various interpretive strategies. After presenting the findings associated with both pedagogical and interpretive moves, the discussion will bring these two strands together to consider their interrelationships. In addition, implications for further research will also be addressed.

Interpretive Moves

During classroom discussions, students enacted several interpretive moves or *paths to interpretation* for making sense of the visual, textual and graphic design features of *Voices in the Park* and eventually other postmodern picturebooks during the unit of study. After students generated initial noticings and named various visual and textual elements, in other words students created their collective *perceptual inventory* (Panofsky, 1955), these noticings and initial ideas were organized on classroom charts. Subsequently, their noticings and associated namings of visual images and design features were used to draw inferences and consider possible meanings or interpretations of these elements. The interpretive paths used to generate students' interpretations were analyzed separately and eventually recoded into the following three categories: 1) authorial intentionality, 2) intertextuality/intervisuality, and 3) visual representations and symbols.

Authorial Intentionality

During the first two days of the whole-class discussions of *Voices in the Park*, the teacher generated charts containing lists of what students were noticing. Students were subsequently asked to think about what some of these visual, textual, and design features might mean. Students initially focused on why they thought the author Anthony Browne included particular elements in the illustrations, made characters act in certain ways, and created the picturebook the way he did. For example, students suggested Browne used gorillas and monkeys because he likes them or dreams about them; other students suggested Browne put weird things in the illustrations because he wanted readers to notice things. Additionally, students suggested Browne wrote and drew about things he had experienced for himself or simply included random things in his illustrations. One student suggested that Browne's editor probably forced Browne to include things he didn't want to include.

The focus of students' initial interpretations was the meaning potential of the author-illustrator's intentions. After discussions focusing on what Browne may or may have not intended, it was suggested by one student that they could ask the author their questions through a website or email message. The focus remained on the author as authority throughout the first few days of the discussion. Even the classroom teacher as the discussion began to shift from what they noticed to what things might mean still asked, "Why would he [Browne] draw on one side of the pole a cloudy day and on the other side of the pole a sunny day?" The focus on the author's intentions as a possible source of meaning was evident throughout the early discussions as presented in the following excerpt:

Teacher: What I love about this, is that there's no right or wrong answer, you know, and it's really whatever you think this stuff means to you and to the story. On Friday, I know that some of you were saying you were interested in learning more about Anthony Browne, just getting some information about him and some of you were kind of wondering, well, what did he mean by this, and what did he mean by that?

Student 1: I thought that the author was like the illustrator because they're the same person.

Teacher: He's the author and the illustrator, yeah, author-slash-illustrator.

Student 2: How can he draw so good? Where does he get his ideas?

Student 3: Maybe we should look to see if he likes hats anywhere in there [in online interviews].

Student 4: I wonder why he draws so many gorillas?

Student 5: Why did he make four stories and use a red hat?

In order to interpret the book in greater depth, students felt they needed to know more about the author and what he had intended when he created the picturebook. The class used the Internet to search for interviews with the author and other *epitextual* information that might shed light on various meanings and interpretations. After the first three days of discussing *Voices in the Park*, the focus gradually shifted away from what Anthony Browne intended or meant, to what things might mean to the students. However, the intentions of the author-illustrator remained an important source of potential meanings during the discussions throughout the unit of study.

Intertextuality / Intervisuality

Students began to make connections from visual images in *Voices in the Park* to visual images in other picturebooks by Anthony Browne they had read and discussed, specifically, *Changes* (Browne, 1990), *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1997), *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983), *Zoo* (Browne, 1992), and *Through the Magic Mirror* (Browne, 1977). These intertextual (Hartman, 1992) or *intervisual* (Mirzeoff, 1998) connections were used to search for patterns that might offer interpretive potential. For example, students discussed how Browne used gorillas and other primates in many of his books, that he likes to hide weird things in the backgrounds of his illustrations, and that several motifs were included across his picturebooks, specifically trees, hats, fences, and street lamps.

Some connections were made *intratextually* (within one picturebook), in particular *Voices in the Park*, and some were made *intertextually* (between picturebooks). The intervisual connections extended across picturebooks created by Browne and picturebooks created by other author-illustrators explored during the unit of study. For example, students noticed that Browne used hats, benches, and street lamps in several illustrations throughout *Voices in the Park* and in some of his other picturebooks. These noticings would eventually lead to assertions about their meaning potentials.

There were several places where the written narrative and the visual images contradicted one another, or established a *counterpoint* between text and image (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). For example, the students noticed in the written narrative the Mother said that the other family's dog was bothering her pedigree Labrador, but in the visual images it was reversed; in fact it was the Mother's dog that was chasing the other family's dog. In addition, students used the written narrative to anchor (Barthes, 1977) possible meanings offered in the illustrations. The text offered additional information, for example the names of the two characters, Smudge and Charles, and that the father was looking for a job, but the focus of the majority of the discussions remained on the visual images and graphic design features.

Visual Representations and Symbols

Visual representations can be used to make particular symbolic or metaphorical connections between objects in an illustration and their possible meanings (Hall, 1997).

Throughout *Voices in the Park*, Browne uses visual representations to create visual references for the reader. These symbolic representations were used to associate visual images with things in the world outside of the picturebooks. Various visual representations offered in *Voices in the Park*, for example Santa Claus, a red hat, screaming trees, lampposts with clouds in them, and rainbows were considered as having potential symbolic meanings when encountered in this picturebook. Students progressed from noticing various visual elements, to naming them, to eventually assigning possible meanings to them.

The students spent a great deal of time discussing three particular visual representations in *Voices in the Park*, namely the red hat, the screaming trees, and the street lamps or lampposts. The red hat, which was depicted floating on the title page or placed on the mother's head in the various stories, was suggested to represent the power the mother wielded over her son, Charles. The students noticed that the red hat had potential symbolic meanings by how it was depicted in various illustrations of Charles' version of his trip to the park. Clouds, lampposts, trees, and bushes took the shape of his mother's hat in various images. The students offered various reasons for the changes in these visual depictions. One student asserted, "Maybe Charles wants to forget about his mother's rules and the hats remind him of his mother when she is not there." Another stated, "Like how he [Charles] doesn't want to say it out loud, but his mom is all strict and talks down and doesn't actually listen to Charles." These statements indicate that the visual representation of the hat came to mean more than simply an item of apparel. Other elements that were considered to offer symbolic meanings were the dogs' leashes, various fences, and rainbows.

Lampposts were viewed as possible symbolic entities and as structural devices in the composition of several illustrations. The students commented on the clouds that were drawn inside the lamppost and associated these clouds with Charles' emotional state. They also suggested that the lampposts served to divide up several images and were indicative of several of the characters' perspectives. For example, one student remarked, "It looks like the Mom has more room on her side of the lamppost [in the illustration], that must mean she has more power than the dad." Another said, "On Charles' side it's all gloomy, but on Smudge's side it's bright and sunny. She [Smudge] must be much happier than Charles."

In addition, Browne alternates between dark and light colors to illustrate the change in characters' perspective from one voice to the next. Students noticed this change in color palette and offered potential meanings for Browne's choices. When the color palette was darker, students suggested it represented the character's moods. For example, a student remarked, "It's darker where the boy [Charles] is because he is sad. And, it's all brighter when the Dad and Smudge return from the park because she chatted him up and cheered him up." Each of the paths opened up interpretive possibilities as young readers discussed and responded to contemporary picturebooks.

Pedagogical Moves

The classroom teacher used units of study as a framework to organize the learning experiences and mini-lessons focusing on contemporary and postmodern picturebooks (Nia, 1999). Initial lessons provided students with strategies for approaching a picturebook, which included keeping track of what students noticed and the naming of

visual, textual, and design features. Charts were used throughout the five-week unit of study to organize students' responses to particular visual, textual, and graphic design features of the picturebooks discussed. Throughout the lessons, think alouds (Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessell, 1993) were used to demonstrate to students how the teacher approached a particular picturebook, how to write down what was noticed on post-it notes, and how to use these noticings to expand interpretations and understandings.

The book *Voices in the Park* was presented to the students as a *cornerstone text* (Serafini & Youngs, 2006) to provide a foundation for this particular unit of study. First, *Voices in the Park* was read aloud and students were invited to share their initial responses during a whole group discussion. Second, students were invited to read the book on their own and create lists of *noticings* to share with the class that were subsequently recorded on classroom charts. Third, the pages of the picturebook were color copied and displayed in four parallel lines, one for each voice in the story, along one wall of the classroom. Students were invited to continue sharing what they noticed about the visual, textual, and design features after the book had been displayed. Next, students were given typed versions of the written text from *Voices in the Park* separated into four parts, one for each voice in the story. Then, students shared the four narratives from the picturebook in a reader's theater format, using their own voices to render the stories orally.

Two categories were generated during further analysis of the data originally coded as pedagogical moves. The first category, *noticing to naming to interpreting*, suggests the teacher used students' noticings of the visual, textual, and design features of picturebooks as a support for naming the various elements, for example saying the illustration contained a "screaming tree," before offering possible meanings or interpretations for what was noticed (Youngs, 2010; Youngs & Serafini, 2011). The second category, *specific to general*, refers to the pedagogical moves the teacher initiated that required students to generalize from their initial noticings to more general comments and ideas about the work of Anthony Browne and picturebooks in general.

Noticing to Naming to Interpreting

Students used post-it notes to write down what they noticed about the visual, textual, and design features of *Voices in the Park* and displayed them on classroom charts. Throughout the first few days, the teacher would direct students back to what they noticed in the picturebook and included on their post-it notes rather than encouraging them to offer preliminary interpretations without providing visual or textual evidence of their interpretations. Although the shift from noticings to meaning potential is important, students were initially directed to reconsider what they noticed during the first days of the discussions before offering interpretations. This pedagogical move required students to provide evidence from the visual, textual, and design elements of *Voices in the Park* to support their inferences.

On the fourth day of discussing *Voices in the Park*, the teacher asked students to do some *hard thinking*, and talk about what the various things they noticed might mean. During this discussion, the teacher used the term *represent*, when asking students what particular elements in the images or text might mean. This invitation to shift from noticings to what things might represent or mean marked a significant departure from earlier discussions. It is important to note that the questions posed by the teacher were

phrased in an open-ended way, asking students what things *might* mean, suggesting interpretations can vary and be open for further consideration and revision.

Specific to General

A chart was constructed that focused on the entire corpus of Anthony Browne's work as an author-illustrator. This chart encouraged students to generalize about his work across picturebooks and move from specific examples to statements about Browne's work and ideas in general. Moving from specific comments to generalizations, students were able to synthesize some of their noticings and initial impressions into assertions about the meanings of a particular picturebook or Browne's illustration techniques in broader detail. The teacher encouraged students to infer from their specific noticings to more general interpretations of a book's theme and significance.

Discussion

The three categories of the interpretive paths used by students generated during data analysis, namely authorial intentionality, intertextuality-intervisuality, and visual representations and symbols each led students in different directions as they worked to make sense of *Voices in the Park*, and other contemporary and postmodern picturebooks. During initial discussions, students privileged the author's intentions and personal experiences as the primary path to the potential meanings of his books. Students felt that if they could find out what Anthony Browne intended by the various elements of the picturebook they would have a better sense of what the book really meant. This approach, closely associated with biographical criticism (Culler, 1997), asserts comprehension occurs when the readers' meanings match the author's intentions. As discussions progressed, the students moved from the authorial intentions to other aspects of the picturebooks offering additional possibilities for their interpretations. Asking students to talk about what things might represent rather than what the author-illustrator meant opened up new avenues for students' interpretive processes.

Browne's picturebooks are replete with intratextual and intertextual references (Serafini, 2009). Staying within the *four corners of the text* (Pearson & Hiebert, 2013), or seeing the text itself as the container of meaning, would eliminate these intra and intertextual references as possible interpretive paths or strategies, forcing readers to engage in some form of *close reading-viewing* practice that would narrow the terrain within which students ventured to make sense of the various picturebooks being discussed. Meanings reside in the text, the visual images, the reader, and the sociocultural contexts in which the reading occurs (Beach, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1978), not simply as an objective truth embedded within the four corners of the text itself. Our instructional practices need to expand the interpretive possibilities for young readers, not narrow down their choices to the literal aspects of the visual and verbal narratives included in picturebooks.

Except for a few students briefly mentioning how the font differed from voice to voice in *Voices in the Park* and a single reference to the author's use of the name Charley rather than Charles, the majority of the noticings and interpretations focused on aspects of the visual images and graphic design features, not the written narrative. To address this omission, on the fourth day of discussing *Voices in the Park* the teacher focused students' attention on the written text by typing up the four perspectives in the book on single

pages, one for each voice. Without the help of the illustrations, students were forced to focus on the written text. However, during these discussions students did not make any connections to the written narratives from other books by Browne during these discussions. Intervisual connections dominated intertextual connections throughout these discussions.

This focus on the visual and design features of contemporary and postmodern picturebooks suggests readers need more support in understandings how illustrations work and how visual images and design elements represent potential meanings. Teachers need to develop with students a metalanguage for talking about visual images and design features to help support students' interpretations (Unsworth, 2006). The focus of one's instructional moves must expand beyond strategies for comprehending written text to address the visual images and design features of multimodal ensembles, in particular with contemporary and postmodern picturebooks. One consequence of this study was that the teacher realized the importance of slowing down when investigating these postmodern picturebooks and allowing students, and herself, ample time to consider these rich, complex texts. She mentioned that she would never read a picturebook in the same way again.

Students' noticings eventually led to interpretations as they drew upon all the things that were noticed across the first few days of discussion to support their interpretive processes. The teacher helped students make the shift from noticing and naming to interpretation by asking students to consider what things might mean, providing ample time for students to consider all the possible meanings of the visual images, design features, and written narrative, and guiding them to see things they would not have seen on their own.

The first few days of discussion focused on the noticing and naming of literal details. It was not until the third and fourth days of discussion did students begin to offer more sophisticated interpretations. This is a significant assertion in that classroom teachers need to revisit picturebooks more than once to support students' inferential thinking and interpretive processes. Students in this study did not jump to interpretations, rather they were guided along the way by the teacher's comments and instructional approaches.

Students initially noticed many of the pop culture references included in the illustrations, for example Santa Claus, King Kong, and Mary Poppins but did not name the works of fine art that were included, namely DaVinci's *Mona Lisa* or Hal's *The Laughing Cavalier*. One might assume the students might not know the work of Dutch painter Frans Hals, but it was interesting no students mentioned the *Mona Lisa* by name. Artistic allusions (Beckett, 2010) have become an increasingly relevant technique in picturebook illustration. Helping students make these intervisual connections to famous works of art and important art styles or movements is an important part of the process of comprehending the visual images in picturebooks. In order to make symbolic connections between the visual images and the world outside of the text, teachers need to be able to bring in visual references to help students connect the things being referenced to the visual images students' encounter in multimodal ensembles.

Meanings constructed during the act of reading and viewing are socially embedded, temporary, partial, and plural. There is not a single, objective truth about a particular visual image, but many truths, each with its own authority and its own sense of

viability (Aiello, 2006; Albers, 2008). The discussions that took place served as a space for the consideration and negotiation of meaning potentials offered by various students. Individual students considered the meanings offered by others and used these interpretations as they discussed various picturebooks in further detail. Students' interpretations drew upon author's intentions, intertextual and intervisual connections, visual and symbolic representations during their discussion to try and make sense of the multimodal elements of contemporary and postmodern picturebooks.

The two pedagogical moves of *noticing-naming-interpreting* and *specific-to-general* are closely connected to the interpretive moves generated by the students. The teacher's focus on the visual elements and details of the illustrations guided students to spend several days sharing ideas about what they noticed and what they thought about *Voices in the Park*. After the teacher invited students to offer possible interpretations of the visual and textual narratives, students drew upon the evidence they had amassed throughout their discussions and creations of the visual displays of their noticings.

Not surprising, students learned to attend to the elements of the picturebook to which the teacher focused their attention. Participants in these literary discussions learned to join the interpretive community developed within their classroom setting (Fish, 1980; Smith, 1988). They used the interpretive paths and processes that were endorsed by their teacher and peers to construct meanings. The process of *socialization* into how students should talk about books is not necessarily a good or bad thing by itself (Anderson & Weninger, 2012). However, when students learn to talk in specific ways about books they are also learning not to talk in other, possibly important ways of discussing literature. It is as important to consider the ways that students did not talk about texts as it is to consider the interpretive moves they made.

Implications for Further Research

This study was an initial foray into a larger study across classrooms and multimodal ensembles to understand the relationships among picturebooks, readers' interpretive moves, and teacher's pedagogical choices. How teachers respond to the noticings and interpretations of their students is as important as the lessons they plan ahead. Further research into the processes by which students are socialized into particular ways of discussing literature are essential if literacy educators are going to expand the instructional approaches for making sense of multimodal ensembles. In addition, research into how teachers support the development of a metalanguage for talking about visual images and design features is emerging and must continue if instructional approaches are going to address the multimodal nature of contemporary texts.

Concluding Remarks

In discussions focusing on contemporary picturebooks, students are taught what to attend to, how the visual elements perceived are interpreted, what interpretations have more viability than others, and what aspects of multimodal ensembles are worthy of consideration. Since all interpretive processes are partial, ideologically positioned, and subjective, it is important to interrogate which strategies or paths are being endorsed during discussions.

The three interpretive paths used primarily by students in this study, namely authorial intention, intertextuality and intervisuality, and visual representation and

symbols are good starting places for supporting students' interpretations of multimodal ensembles. However, it is also equally important to introduce and support interpretive strategies and paths that focus on the structural aspects of visual and design elements (*how* images come to mean) as well as the ideological perspectives (*whose* world views do the interpretations serve). It is only by expanding our students' interpretive repertoires across perceptual, structural, and ideological dimensions (Author, 2010) that we as teachers can fully support students development as critical, sophisticated readers.

The pedagogical moves of noticing to naming to interpretation, and specific to general both moved students from the literal or denotative to the inferential or connotative levels of meaning (Barthes, 1977). As students began to notice specific textual, visual, and design features, the teacher's instructional approaches supported this transition from simple perceptions to more sophisticated interpretations. This shift from what is included to what things might mean should become the focus of classroom discussions and literature study.

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