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**The Challenge of Fairy Tales: Eliciting a Critical Gendered
Response in Young Children**

by

Jane Elisabeth Bradford

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degree of
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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how fairy tale discussions and activities affect children's responses to literary gendered stereotypes. The children in this investigation were aged between four and six years. Notably, much of the earlier research in this area was carried out over thirty years ago with articulate 7- to 11-year-olds; this study aimed to identify the potential for imaginative transformations in the younger formative group and contribute towards their theoretical and practical knowledge base in the Early Years. A participatory Mosaic approach was adopted to enable the children in small, single-sex and mixed gender groupings, to express their interpretations, experiences and understanding about the story messages as fully and naturally as possible. Information on their family and school cultures was gathered through questionnaires and interviews with parents and teachers in three town state schools and a private Waldorf Steiner kindergarten.

The study determined that cultural influences were even stronger and more exaggerated than in the past, with boys using dominant and powerful language, whilst girls used mostly diminishing and understating words. Similar to earlier studies, the children were initially resistant to alternative and subversive gender models; in spite of the stereotypical responses identified, I noted that some children, and boys in particular, were beginning to be receptive to different gendered perspectives following the discussions and activities. This research has shown the urgent need to provide a greater diversity of role models in books at school, and in training and support for adults, particularly fathers, in respect of critical storytelling strategies. But most significantly, this study's findings have broken new ground in this area and shown that despite cultural pressure to conform to gendered patterns of behaviour, young children can be encouraged to think critically and positively about their own gendered identity and cultural messages.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of study

This case study will examine how critical discussions and activities can influence and stimulate young children's perceptions of gendered identity and imaginative responses to fairy tale stereotypes. It will explore the use of fictional role models to support their understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender and gendered behaviour, especially when books and other story-telling media predominately promote traditional heroic male and passive female characteristics. This research will investigate how even young children can begin to use critical thinking in order to succeed on their own terms, rather than fulfilling desirable cultural expectations. Storytelling strategies to support the receptiveness and co-construction of transformative ideas and positive self-affirming language will also be considered. Finally, this study will identify the reading approaches that parents and Early Years (EY) teachers could use to engage children's interests, in order to determine the impact of their story messages and unconsciously biased expectations. The research will be undertaken from both post-structuralist and fourth-wave feminist perspectives. Alternative gender identities will be considered due to the understanding that all genders play an important part in ensuring transformation for equality, agency, choice and egalitarian relationships, as promoted in Emma Watson's *#HeForShe* (Cole, 2020) feminist initiative.

1.2 Research background

My interest in young children's perceptions of gender identity and cognitive development arose from my dual professional background: first, as a teacher I have a pedagogical interest in children's imaginative creativity; second, as a storytelling module co-ordinator, which is part of my Further Education EY lecturer role, I am particularly fascinated in the way that family relationships are characterised in fairy tales to support an understanding of gender diversity and well-being.

1.2.1 Young children's imaginative development

My first reason for investigating young children's imaginative development arose from my observation of their 'thinking' discussions: in particular their philosophical insights into the story world and how their knowledge of gender roles might be questioned and developed. I was interested to find out whether critical conversations could support children's identification of gendered power roles and

relationships in fairy tales, and subsequently contribute to the formation of egalitarian beliefs and eudaimonia. Deci and Ryan (2008) explained that eudaimonia was the Greek word for happiness and wellbeing, and in the Aristotelian tradition, involves the autonomy to make the right virtuous choice. Due to the particularly young age of the children in this study, it was important to consider their stage of cognitive development, their knowledge of the world, and the influence these elements could have on their ability to formulate questions and to reason verbally.

Vygotsky's (1962) cultural-historical theory argued that abstract understandings about language are entirely possible within the early years, especially if learning is mediated by intellectual tools such as thinking, self-expression and problem solving. He proposed that a child's major developmental accomplishments emerge as a result of growing up in a unique 'social situation of development' (Fleer and Veresov, 2017). Contrary to the belief that in order to play children need imagination, Vygotsky (1967) claimed the opposite, and argued that imagination was an outgrowth from play:

The role the child plays, and her relationship to the object, if the object has changed its meaning, will always stem from the rules, i.e., the imaginary situation will always contain rules. In play the child is free. But this is an illusory freedom. (op. cit.:10).

This study will investigate how fairy tales can support the imaginative development of children to transform oppressive stereotypes and inspire agentic action.

A defining feature of the Vygotskian theory of development was the genealogical element of co-construction through the interactions with a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), rather than any spontaneous occurrences. The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability than the learner (Roche, 2015:9). His insightful work has been extended by child developmentalist theorists, such as Bruner's (1983) scaffolding theory that children need active support from teachers within their proximal zone of development to become independent learners. This study will consider the intersectionality of positions within the researcher's role, such as acting as an MKO and as a participatory co-researcher, along with the equal participatory roles that children partake in as 'knowers' in learning cultural concepts. Vygotsky (1978;1997) theorised that the internal learning process enables the

unification of language and thinking processes, *rechevóye myshlénie*, leading to higher-level cognitive processes and gender perceptions (Lantolf *et al.*, 2018:64). Higher mental functions were regarded as the ‘tools’ of the culture in which the child lives, which are passed down and so are culturally facilitated. The cultural tools introduced by the educators, publishers and authors will be examined in this research, particularly languaging: the relationship between speaking and thinking processes.

Following Vygotsky’s work, Wells (2009:xix) carried out a large-scale longitudinal language and literacy study with boys and girls aged from pre-school to ten years old from 1969 to 1984, both in their homes and their schools. The study showed hardly any gender differences in their verbal and thinking skills, but that the classroom discussions were mostly teacher-led rather than dialogic due to the preparation needed for future examinations. Interestingly, Layard (2020) conjectured that assessments are far less valuable as regards determining a child’s current happiness, and whether they will have a happy life. This study aims to contribute towards investigating how young children’s reflective and critical responses in dialogic storytelling sessions can be supported.

1.2.2 Non-traditional stories

The second reason for investigating post-storytelling discussions was through my interest in how diverse family relationships were being presented against a background of story censorship. In one seminar, a student disclosed how she had purchased a book for her son to share with his father for Father’s Day, namely Alison Ritchie’s (2007) *Me and My Dad*, which illustrated a rare trusting and loving father-child relationship. The student explained that her nursery workplace considered the book politically divisive, especially for children whose fathers were absent from home and even in prison. Her experience led me to reflect that the boy whose father was in prison was consequently being punished twice for his father’s behaviour: once by the judicial system which enforced their separation through imprisonment, and secondly, by the educational system which censored the book. Controversy over censorship occurred similarly in Anderton Park Primary School, Sparkhill, in Birmingham City. Parveen (2019) reported on parents’ protests against the use of *No Outsiders* relationships and sex education (RSE) materials, whose introduction into schools had been led by the Children’s Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield. Some parents argued that they wanted their children to be allowed

to be children with the slogan 'let kids be kids', and to be taught about 'Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve', as portrayed in Richardson's and Parnell's *And Tango Makes Three* (2005). An imam further exacerbated the parental fears by declaring that the children were being instructed about anal sex, paedophilia and transgenderism (Parveen, 2019). However, the democratic policy of protecting the human rights of others was firmly supported by Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State for Education (Emmerson, 2019). Griffiths (2020) reported that Jabbar Hussain was being prosecuted for withdrawing his 9-year old son from Parkfield Primary School, Saltley in Birmingham, and was prepared to go to prison. Hussain was objecting to the transgender aspects of the RSE education being delivered. The concerns he raised were about his son's psychological welfare: that he may be learning about being 'in the wrong body', as illustrated in Walton's *Introducing Teddy* (2016). These three separate incidents demonstrate that censorship of gender acts and performance is a complex and challenging issue. There are often many variables involved that can have a profound effect on the way children learn and the way parents and schools serve to educate children, both independently and together.

Teachers are duty-bound to align policies with the *Equality Act* (HMSO, 2010) and with *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (DFE, 2019a), and to teach a curriculum that does not discriminate against protected characteristics, which include those on sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. In addition, following the legislation enshrined in the *Children and Social Work Act* (2017 sections thirty-four and thirty-five) and the governmental *Statutory Guidance: Relationship Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education* (DFE, 2019b) document, which stipulates that governors and school management must ensure that the subject is resourced, timetabled and inclusive. A teachers' survey report (Sex Education Forum, 2018) found that from among two hundred and forty teachers in England, 29% had never received any training in RSE or experienced any quality RSE themselves. According to the *School Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2019), RSE is equally important as other curriculum subjects:

From September 2020...Primary-age children must be taught about positive relationships and respect for others, and how these are linked to promoting good mental health and well-being (op. cit.: Paragraph 20).

A school's policy is a good place to clarify how their RSE programme contributes to the ethos and gender-neutral values of the school. Emmerson (2019a) explained that once RSE becomes statutory, it will become subject to Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (2019). A key aspect is personal development, and this applies similarly in the *Early Years' Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2019). Personal development incorporates several connected dimensions, including the promotion of British values, diversity, equality, quality of debate and discussion of pupils' experiences; these are central parts for this study, which can lead to agency and egalitarian relationships.

In the three incidents referenced, children's books were being censored due to cultural values and beliefs. Christensen (2003) claimed that 'picture books are produced under specific historical and ideological conditions' (op. cit.:238). It is important to consider how childhoods are governed through the complex power relations in the production of children's literature. John Locke's (1693) book, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, introduced the notion of *tabula rasa*, where children's minds were regarded as a clean slate, and that knowledge could only be gained through experience. Following Locke's enlightenment theory, Grenby and Immel (2009:28) wrote that children's literature was directed from focusing less on the instillation of a moral character through fear, and more upon the ancient idea of 'utile et dulce', useful and pleasant tuition. At the same time, Rousseau's *Emile* (Cahn, 2012) highlighted the value of children's active autonomy in their development, and their independent capacities for appreciating aesthetics. The changes in literal thought from the fearful didactic pathway to an aesthetical experience alongside the burgeoning refinement of the middle classes, began the age of innocence and censorship of sex and gender in children's literature. As illustrated by the case of Anderton Park Primary School, the production of children's literature needs to attract not only children, but parents and educators as well.

Authors' and publishers' socially required acts of self-governance in the publication of literature reflects the Foucauldian panopticon of biopower. Foucault (1995), was a French social theorist, who expounded that power and truths are often positioned next to the statements of censorship. Taylor (2017a) described how Foucault defined biopower as the 'power over *bios* or life, and lives may be managed on both an individual and a group basis' (Taylor, 2017a:238). It operates through the shifting forms of knowledge and power that produce discourses of norms and normality, such as categories of gender (Foucault, 1980). Alongside biopower, Foucault (1995)

identified the power of discipline concerning the anatomo-politics of the human body and the construction of the controlling bio-political mechanisms of the population. This social disciplining power manifests in an individual's desire for self-conformity, which in turn creates docile bodies. Censorship in schools' literature often leads to limited gendered perceptions, conventions and motivations through obedient adherence to educators' and politicians' desires whilst omitting others' perceptions, as my student's experience illustrated. The question is raised whether a critical discourse of gender can challenge the dominant ideology of political rationality in literature to produce progressive solutions rather than the desired 'correct' ones or the 'right' behaviours.

1.3 The challenge of fairy tales

To enhance cognitive development and address potential censorship issues, the young children in this study will be encouraged to critically explore gender roles. Tatar (1992:230-231) explained that gendered stereotypes are often used as symbolic metaphors to illustrate culturally desired emotional expressions, behaviours and expectations. Children's perceptions of gender, their understanding of how individuals are culturally classified, and their emotional awareness, are highly significant factors in shaping their ability to take on board gender structures outside the norm. Fairy tales draw upon emotions: the stronger the emotion, the stronger the message, which is why they are such a powerful and effective means of instilling cultural narratives, such as patriarchal authority. The study will include an exploration of the cultural hegemonic power structures contained within fairy tales and the influence they have on children's interests, relationships and aspirations.

Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity stated that the meaning of gender was dependent on the compulsory heterosexuality within which it was performed. She perceived gender as a continuous performance that forms a new meaning with every repeated act due to coercion. Hence, she argued that gender was provisional, shifting and contingent rather than fixed, which eschews notions of authenticity, authority, and universality. This research will aim to investigate whether critical discussions can create open and flexible understandings for imaginative transformation, over closed perceptions of traditional 'natural' factors of gendered identity which young children perceive to be true.

To strengthen an inclusive and egalitarian focus on gender in schools, this research will investigate the gender-neutral practices necessary for equality to be achieved. Despite statutory frameworks, Holland *et al.* (1998) observed that schools often provide reading materials with symbolic resources supporting the construction of traditional socio-cultural systems that can oppress the moral and potential economic agency of individuals. This study will examine how parents and teachers can encourage critical and philosophical story discussions about traditional and alternative gender stereotypes for personal autonomy, eudaimonia and equality of opportunities.

1.4 Research framework

The central research inquiry for this study will seek to consider the question: “How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?”. It was chosen after consideration of the previous research on cognitive development, and the important associations identified between stories, gendered power relations, self-expression and regulatory practices. The pilot study findings (Appendix 1) indicated the need to encourage a multi-dimensional understanding of gender, through additional story related activities utilising the Mosaic approach.

An outline of the structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter two, the literature review, examines the theoretical overview and analysis of cultural tools and language that are relevant to this study. This examination will be based primarily upon the work of: social and moral theorists Vygotsky, Foucault, Butler and Gilligan; sociologists Clarricoates and Walkerdine; and educational theorists Davies and Paley. The chapter is divided into three main strands to determine children’s understanding of gender through literary discourse:

1. The association between gender, culture and power relations.
2. The influence of symbolic cultural tools on relationships, emotional expression and imagination.
3. The challenge of confronting cultural perceptions of gendered identity.

To enable the study to make a comparison between the state schools and a Waldorf Steiner (WS) kindergarten on the development of gender in early childhood, intersectional cultural factors such as the effect of different ethnicities and religions

have been kept as constant as possible. The age group chosen was due to my own professional experience and areas of expertise. The study will focus mainly on pedagogy and its influence on children from predominantly middle-class backgrounds, as earlier research such as Steedman's (1982) *The Tidy House*, which will be discussed, has concentrated on children from working class backgrounds. The children from the WS kindergarten came from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Selg, 2010), and the inclusion of their parents will provide an insight regarding their liberalism towards gender (Chapter 7).

Chapter three, the methodology, discusses the qualitative theoretical assumptions and use of the child-centred Mosaic approach and eclectic techniques, along with ethical considerations when working with such young participants. The contribution of critical reflexivity is considered to determine the participants' understandings of gender and to sharpen the analysis involving (inter-)subjective modes of gendered knowledge construction and cultural tools. Reflexive methods, reflexivity-as-praxis and the researcher's positionality are reviewed to strengthen the overall trustworthiness of this study.

Chapter four, the justification of stories, presents six fairy tales chosen for the study, three read from contemporary picture books and three retold orally. A brief outline of each story and their messages are given together with the reason for their choice.

Chapters five to seven, the responses from the children's storytelling sessions, the parents' questionnaires and the teachers' questionnaires and interviews, form the centre of this study. These three key chapters contain the findings and discussion of the interpretative data from the thematic inductive frameworks of analysis.

Chapter eight, the conclusion, explores the implications and limitations of these findings, and discusses the recommendations from these findings.

In the next chapter, the Literature Review, the previous research will be reflected upon to consider:

1. How storytelling discussions and activities can enhance the meaningfulness of children's experiences, knowledge and understanding of gender and power relations; and how cultural beliefs can influence their engagement with literature and the formation of polarised gender boundaries.

2. How the different approaches of storytelling and critical questioning of cultural symbols can develop children's understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender expectations in order to succeed on their own terms; and how external identification and endorsement of gender attributes can shape children's self-identity, friendships and choices.

3. How children's receptivity to the presentation of alternative or subversive story characters can affect the co-construction of transformative and progressive thinking; and how to challenge oppressive cultural perceptions of equality that, paradoxically, are mostly supported by female gatekeepers and presented by female publishers.

2 Literature Review

The preceding chapter, the Introduction, discussed how an important way of developing young children's critical understanding of cultural gendered stereotypes is through dialogical approaches using stories. To enable children to develop agency and autonomy from story experiences, it is necessary to clarify gender references and power relations, symbolism within the story and its use of cultural tools. This chapter will explore these factors by examining the philosophical arguments, theoretical research and pedagogical frameworks in this area: first, the association between gender, culture and power relations; second, the influence of symbolic cultural tools on relationships, emotional expression and imagination; and third, the challenge of confronting cultural perceptions of gendered identity. In particular I noted how earlier studies carried out over thirty years ago were conducted mostly with 7- to 11-year-olds. I believe the reason that researchers often choose to elicit opinions from older children is that they are able to articulate their thoughts clearly and so their comments are easier to assimilate satisfactorily. This study therefore aims to go further and make a valuable contribution to the limited research on the exploration of gender through storytelling discussions and activities in the early years. Fairy tales were chosen due to their suitability for this age group: as Favat (1977:25) established that children's interest in fairy tales emerges around the age of five.

2.1 The association between gender, culture and power relations

I will begin this section by considering the objectivity of Foucault, who studied the influence of social relations masked by power operating from below, to the subjectivity of Butler, who looked at this through gender performativity coerced from above. These two key and contrasting paradigms of influence will be presented to determine the understanding of gendered power and social relationships by young children.

2.1.1 Biopower and restraint

Foucault's (2003) relationship with dominant power discourses was unique due to his argument involving the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledge' (op. cit.:7). The subjugated knowledge that he refers to may not be officially approved or recognised as opposed to, for instance, the scientific, and which may not have even surfaced. Knowledge is derived from social power relations rather than something to be

pursued, from the practices that shape truths which become 'taken for granted', such as gender roles and expectations.

This study will consider the features of biopower and disciplinary power, which Foucault (1980:92-102) established as working in the modern West. Biopower is a dominant system of social governance, 'whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalisation, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus' (op. cit.:89). He conjectured that power is omnipresent and operates through 'non-egalitarian' mobile relations or social networks: 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (op. cit.:93). Power exists in *all* our relationships, and no relation is free from power. Taylor (2017a:125-126) wrote that Foucault acknowledged that even though no one has power as such, some are in more privileged positions than others within these social networks. This is important when considering the researcher-participant relationships, and how reciprocity can be achieved.

Foucault's conception of power contrasted with the view of a centralised and dominant force: 'power is exercised and not possessed by any particular group or institution, whilst it is productive and not repressive' (Tesar, 2014:862). Regarding the French government's desire to manage population growth, Foucault (1980) firmly rejected the repressive hypothesis that proposed the rise of the bourgeoisie classes initiated the perception of sex only within matrimony. He argued that the repression of sex was supported by power that comes from below, through moralistic teaching and perceptions. He claimed that the opportunity to observe how power of conformity operates is missed if the focus is directed exclusively on politicians and laws, instead of observing how peers, families and children are normalising those around them in social discourses. Foucault's notion of power operating from below and within relations will be considered in this study.

Foucault (1980) believed that power relations are intentional and non-subjective. People are self-consciously aware of the strategies of power they are employing in their relations, but rarely reflect about the power-effects of the bigger picture. He believed that power should not be studied on its own, rather in relation to particular institutions, political constructs, ideologies or governments and to the way in which it acts as a disciplinary force and practice. Through institutions such as families and schools, the state is able to monitor and control many aspects of life. Foucault

(1980:139) explained that institutional disciplining works 'to discipline the body, optimise its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls', thereby producing the types of bodies that society requires. Foucault (1995) declared that political order is maintained through the production of these docile bodies: subjugated and socially productive individuals. This docility supports the normalisation of prescribed behaviour and discourses in neoliberal contexts, which simultaneously delegitimise other habits and practices of self. Foucault's notion of docile bodies provides a trajectory for considering the complex power relations that can influence children in educational settings and which can constrain their childhoods. When considering the production of power, Tesar *et al.* (2016:225) warned that didactical stories can remove children's sovereignty by guiding them towards 'smooth and desirable outcomes'. This study will examine the influence that political agendas have on the formation of idealised childhood realities, such as childhood innocence, and the choice of children's literature.

Foucault (2001) was interested in the historical production of truth in respect of discourse and its potential to shift and gain different meanings forming social change. The paradigm of truth, for Foucault, was embedded in the concepts of power, knowledge and authority, exercised in classrooms, families and by governments. Power could thus be considered as productive and influential in the way that knowledge, and consequently truth, was formed. He believed truth was linked to each discourse, debated and constructed within power relations:

'My intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of truth-teller or truth-telling as an activity ... (the) issue for me was rather the attempt to consider truth-telling as a specific activity, or as a role' (op. cit.:169).

All members of a society or culture are productive vehicles of power, because power is embedded in discourses and norms that form part of the associated practices and daily interactions. Therefore, the formation of truth and knowledge, such as on gender, is not necessarily neutral or objective but represents particular perspectives, conventions and motivations. Through the process of normalisation power is both totalising, as it is able to control all aspects of life by pressurising all to conform to norms, and individualising, with those who fall out of these parameters to be regarded as deviants. The cultural construction of gender normality and

deviance, generates the power to make these norms appear moral or right and drives the desire to conform to these norms. However, the practice of any conformity can lead to voluntary oppression through self-monitoring, which is achieved on two interacting levels, practice and discourse, and thereby marginalisation. Taylor (2017:170) recounted how feminists were critical of Foucault's (1980) *History of Sexuality* due to its lack of analysis with reference to gender, and argued that medicalisation and the discipline of sex was designed to enable the male control of female bodies. Patriarchal power over female bodies will be considered in this study, and the disciplinary and surveillance strategies children are learning to employ over themselves.

Giugni (2006) contended that 'children are savvy power brokers; they are political and moral agents' (op. cit.:106). She explained that children's superhero goodie and baddie discourses are significant as they enable participation in a desirable cultural group and create a sense of belonging. To rewrite the processes of gender interpellation, Rowe (2005) proposed 'differential belonging', a tactical manoeuvre to disrupt gender binaries due to the movement between and among ideological positionings. The key to differential belonging was that individuals do not have to be defined by identity politics; rather, it emphasised the multiple paths that they may travel in their circles of belonging and the risks they may take in becoming the 'other'. This study will explore children's early political discourses, their need to belong and to have access to the possibilities of transformability.

2.1.2 Gender discrimination

It is important to consider the meaning of gender and to determine the cultural significance attached to the categorisation of the biological sexes. Butler (1990) claimed that most feminists' arguments were too narrowly focused on the misogynistic aspects, leaving the category of sex unchallenged. Feminists were absorbed with presenting gender as a patriarchal construct, which was combined with a unifying pre-discursive experience of women. Okin (1989), a liberal feminist philosopher, defined gender as 'the deeply entrenched institutionalisation of sexual difference' (op. cit.:6). Furthermore Ferguson (2016) maintained that this definition continues to be valid some thirty years on, with persistent gender inequities in the family, work place and politics due to the cultural ideology of the traditional family roles. Whereas Butler (1990) defined gender as a social role performed by individuals, validated and accepted by society. '*Gender is a kind of imitation for*

which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself' (Butler cited in Salih and Butler, 2004:127).

Butler (2010) argued for a varied perspective of gender and more variety within diversity. The traditional feminist stance she regarded as 'a nostalgic and parochial ideal that refuses the contemporary demand to formulate an account of gender as a complex cultural construction' (op. cit.:46-47). In accepting the view there was a relationship between sex and gender, feminists continued to naturalise the gender categories they aimed to radically politicise. She pointed out that the 'binary, heterosexist framework...carves up genders into masculine and feminine and forecloses the kinds of subversive and sporadic convergences that characterise gay and lesbian cultures' (op. cit.:84-85). Foucault and Butler both wrote that sex is a social construct, which feminists categorise as gender. Everything that is discussed about gender, such as there being only two sexes, forms a gendered interpretation (Taylor, 2017:178).

In the same way as disciplinary power and biopower functions for Foucault, Butler (1988) regarded gender identities as a result of repeated compulsory performances of gender determined by the sociopolitical and contingent constructs interwoven with regulatory aspects of sex and sexuality. She thus proposed her performativity theory of gender as:

'a stylised repetition of acts...which are internally discontinuous...[so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (op. cit.:519).

Butler's (2011) theory of gender performativity put forward the alternative position to one's gender as a natural given: gender is something that we do rather than what we are. It offered the notion that our gender identities are characteristics that only enable us to exhibit a certain level of power through the skill and frequency of these reiterative and citational performances. She debated the construction of gender and who was doing the construction: 'Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves (op. cit.:xvi). She believed

that discourses were performative acts that constructed the subject positions for the self to occupy: alongside a constitutive 'outside' with tenuous borders. The possibilities of addressing cultural bias and discrimination and of tolerating diversity can only be contemplated if gender, and associated values and expectations, were regarded as neither fixed nor stable or coherent. The notion of gendered subjectivity is entirely a social construct into which different meanings can be injected, because there is no 'essence' of gender within individuals. Power is inextricably linked and woven throughout these gender performances, acts and exchanges. In children's literature, Stephens (1992:122) described the exploration of the fluidity of gendered performance as a breaking of the norms of official speech and, I would add, of power relations.

The sexual nature of politics, as Foucault expounded, was captured by French feminist philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (1949:142). She declared that everyone is born with a sex in the anatomical sense, but a person acquires gender over time, 'One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one'. As Butler (2010) reasoned, 'Foucault points out that...systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent... And the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation' (op. cit.:4). Butler (2010:xxx) denoted how politics functions through the heterosexual matrix in which individuals' positions are only rendered coherent through the practices of traditional heterosexuality. She rejected the notion that biology structures our understanding of gender and sexuality; it is the biopolitical implantation of sexualities that produces our current categorisation (Taylor, 2017:181). Instead, she advocated for the unmasking of the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality and *to trouble* the categories of sex and gender. Following Foucault, she described how we live in society that heterosexualises desire, with children presumed to be heterosexual and cisgender until proven otherwise.

Hoyle (2017) reported that even young children are becoming increasingly preoccupied with gender identification and with ways of categorising themselves. Accompanying this, teachers are having to become familiar with the terms for gender identities, such as non-binary, genderqueer, transgender and cisgender. Espinoza (2017) noted there was a real fear in schools over causing offence as gender orientation becomes increasingly culturally complex, with teachers understandably adhering strictly to what is considered morally and politically correct.

This study will show how gender is a contentious sociopolitical subject which is surrounded with ambiguity and trepidation. It will investigate the provision of critical discussion by teachers and their parents to allow children to understand the implications of stereotypical gendered meanings within story contexts.

2.1.3 Subjective performativities

Liotard's (1984) theory of performativity extended Foucault's post-structuralist concepts of normalised and governable individuals by considering the subsumption of education to support the efficient functioning of a socially forced ranking system (Marshall, 1999). He regarded the use of stories with children as a means of conceptualising the prescriptive ways of developing and performing that are culturally required. Lyotard (1984) proposed that stories embody certain regimes: regimes of truth, knowledge and of government, which produce a normative certainty necessary for outcome-focused childhoods. Children and their childhoods are more often measured in terms of how well they can perform their expected roles within the limited spaces they are allowed to manoeuvre, rather than centred on what they learn. Wohlwend's (2012) study on gender identity with two kindergarten boys stated that fairy tales can perpetuate ongoing gender disparities and highlighted the 'need for nuanced understanding of the complex ways that young children take, replay, or revise the gendered messages designed into their favourite media' (op. cit.:594). This study will build upon Lyotard's theory and Wohlwend's research by exploring progressive strategies to support the growth of children's understanding about gender.

Rousseau (Cahn, 2012:139) was wary of the teaching of fairy tales and raised concerns about the desire of schools, through storytelling, to inculcate truths and knowledge to mould children into obedience and docility that kills their ability to think, create or generate ideas. He outlined how these elements can be rooted into society's constructed roles and categories, which are characterised by oppressive servitude and misery. The effectiveness of any democratic practice and agency for children requires valuing different perspectives and being open to questioning truth regimes (McLeod, 2011; McLeod and Giardiello, 2019:115).

2.1.4 Intertextual decoding of gender identities

Kristeva (1980:165) stressed the importance of challenging the historical gendered power dynamics that lie within a story. Stories are not unilinear entities but a

heterogenous combination of texts where any version is literary and social, creative and cultural. Kristeva (cited in Culler, 2001) opined that 'every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it' (op. cit.:116). Kristeva's (1986) notion of intertextuality is important in terms of identifying the relational and multi-various gender identities and power structures encoded within texts, hence the ambiguity often found in them. Kristeva, though, was criticised by Butler (2010), who resisted gender essentialism even for the emancipation of women, due the fact that non-heterosexual women were excluded from her research. As Minns (1991:44) ascertained in her study on gender-based policies in the classroom, there is nothing constant about how fairy tales are passed on through the generations and across cultures. Young children will not be aware of how these stories are adapted to meet the needs of their audiences and are still changing now. This study will explore how storytelling activities can help them to identify cultural values and how to challenge limiting gendered categorisation and characteristics.

2.1.5 Bias of the dinosaur curriculum

Clarricoates (1978:353) described how teachers of children aged 6 to 7 years old, in their attempt to exercise control over the class upon which their reputation of competency depended, drew upon skewed cultural expectations. Her findings showed that classroom life was centrally geared around the boys due to the teachers' underlying assumptions about sex-roles, and unconscious negative discrimination was directed against the girls. This action contributed towards the notion of the 'hidden' curriculum, which covertly differentiates to the advantage of boys and the detriment of girls. A no-win situation is created for girls, as even if they conform, are considerate, work hard and achieve, they are still perceived as weaker and less intelligent than their male counterparts. From these perceptions they learn submissiveness and self-deprecation, which is looked on unfavourably by society. Simmons (2010) opined that there has never been a better time for girls in the sense of academic and leadership potential in schools; in juxtaposition, their self-esteem and worth continues to lag centuries behind as Clarricoates (1978) found. She noted in her study, that the underlying beliefs and prejudices are hard to address in 'fossilised' classrooms despite new resources and spacious surroundings. In this study, I will explore teachers' perceptions and pedagogies and each school's literary, RSE and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) policies that support them in developing inclusive practice.

This pedagogical bias may exacerbate the literacy gap between boys and girls, which appears early in children's development. The difference in the level of attainment, particularly in reading, has fluctuated slightly over the past four years and is beginning to reduce. From 2016 to 2018 (DFE 2016; 2017; 2018), the gender gap at end of KS1 for reading at the expected standard or above increased from 8% to 9% (71% boys and 80% girls), before lowering in 2019 by 1% (71% boys and 79% girls) (DFE, 2019). The *Reading: The Next Steps* (2015) document recommended the establishment of book clubs and the use of libraries to encourage an interest in stories. Clark and Hawkins' (2011) research found that children who did not use their public library were three times more likely only to read when in class. In comparison, those who used the public library were twice as likely to read outside the classroom every day. Interestingly, the document only asked schools to encourage Year 3 children to gain library membership. I aim to investigate whether this introduction is to be considered late for the development of young children's reading choices and the impact this book selection might have on gender diversity.

2.1.6 Gender-neutrality and positive affirmations

Abdelmoneim, an Accident and Emergency doctor, carried out an experiment to determine the psychological impact of cultural affirmations on perceived academic ability. He worked on the assumption that boys' and girls' brains are almost identical before puberty, and was supported by Professor Rippon, a neuroscientist, 'who insists nurture, not nature, makes girls love dolls and boys like Lego' (Hoyle, 2017). Hoyle (2017) reported that he thus asked the question, 'if the biology is that similar, where do these differences come from?' Abdelmoneim conducted his experiment at Lanesend Primary School on the Isle of Wight with 7-year-olds, by applying gender-neutral pedagogical strategies in the class. The psychometric test results with these children showed that boys were less able to express emotions, but had far more confidence in their abilities (Hoyle, 2017). In contrast, girls had less confidence and believed that the boys were better than them. To even out these disparities and support transformative thinking, positive gendered affirmation and re-normative statements were visibly hung around the classroom, such as 'girls are strong' and 'boys are sensitive', and books that featured passive princesses and aggressive superheroes were removed. However, some of the gender-neutral classroom practices were met with resistance by parents, especially when gender signing was removed from lavatories: notably this change was later reversed. As a result of Abdelmoneim's gender free classroom experiment, one girl commented how

gender-neutral practices were fairer for her; she felt more self-confident and was now the proud owner of a *Star Wars Lego* set. This study will explore the affirmative statements that arise from children's responses during the storytelling sessions, and the influence these positive assertions have on their motivation, agency and physical aspirations.

Another reason for conducting this study with young children was, as Bian *et al.*'s (2017:389) research demonstrated, that by the age of six girls become less likely than boys to associate brilliance with their own gender despite results showing girls' achievements (DFE, 2016-2019). Furthermore, they have a greater tendency to avoid activities said to require genius, which takes a toll on any interests or aspirations for prestigious careers. Bian *et al.*'s (2017) findings showed that the prejudice where females are deemed as intellectually inferior existed not only in adults of both sexes but in children too. Their evidence from the findings showed that children believed boys were innately more gifted, whereas girls did better at school because they worked harder. In addition, Saini (2017:18) reiterated how genius, brilliance or giftedness are often considered as male traits, because history has principally taught about 'lone genius' male figures. This study will consider how the long-held cultural belief of difference between the genders can be challenged to promote the progressive notion of intellectual parity.

2.1.7 Physical identification and cultural endorsement

Ornstein (2011:61) described how 4- and 5-year-olds are at an inflexible stage, acting as their own self-appointed 'chiefs of gender police'. Hains' (2014:2) research demonstrated that young children placed less emphasis on the images in books, and more on external signs including colour, clothing and toys, in forming their understanding of gender roles and expectations. Following Rowe's (2005) theory of belonging, the lure of the Disney princess dovetails at the precise moment that girls need to *prove* that they are girls. To gain the stamp of femininity in society and fortify their vulnerable position, the girls identify with the most exaggerated glamorous images that culture offers. Hart (2016) reported that diversity can be seen to be gradually embraced by more body shapes being represented alongside the iconic wasp-waisted Barbie model from 1959. The findings of Harriger *et al.* (2019:112) illustrated that although thin-ideal internalisation can be challenged this way, girls still showed resistance by not playing with the curvier models (Fig. 2.1).



Fig. 2.1 Barbie gradually becoming real-ish.

Similarly, Wells (2015) reported that childhood male action figures are promoting unrealistic physical expectations amongst boys and creating self-confidence issues as they try to emulate them. Whilst they are encouraged to adopt heroic principles for all to admire, such as truth, honesty, justice, fairness and moral standing, as Danesi (2007:124) discerned, they are also encouraged by proxy to pursue a physical appearance symbolising great courage and strength. Biddulph (2018:2) and Lamont (2019) declared that boys are being taught that to be respected you must have muscles, along with an excitement for competition. These traditional concepts can be seen to be reinforced in 'dolls for boys' which have become significantly more muscular over the past several decades, as seen with Luke Skywalker action figures (Fig. 2.2).

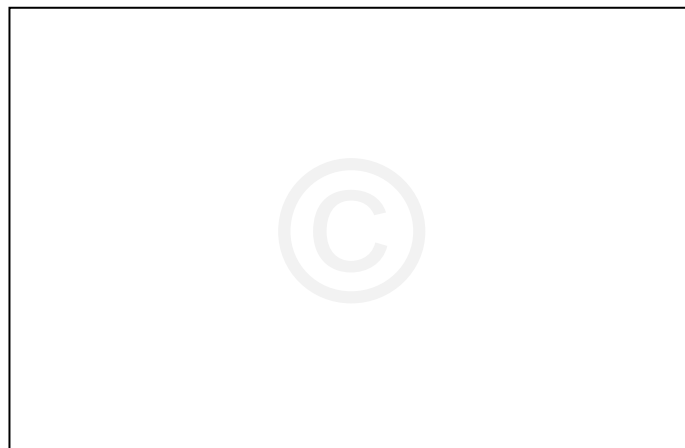


Fig. 2.2 Luke Skywalker action figures.

Due to the 'body perfection' and 'fat shaming' cultures present in social media, the number of boys asking for help has increased at a faster rate than it has for girls according to NHS Digital (Hassall, 2018). 'Bigorexia' is becoming increasingly common amongst boys, driven by an obsession with muscle definition and body shape. Wells (2015) remarked that as unrealistically proportioned action figures damage children's views of their own bodies, they can also damage their perception of family male role models. A boy with an averagely-built father might regard him as less of a successful man, less like a hero and thus less worthy of his respect. This has an impact on family relationships and self-worth, and potentially alienates boys from the moral qualities that were originally characterised in their heroes. In contrast, Adams (2018) reported on some schools allowing male pupils to express themselves by wearing uniform of the opposite gender as depicted in stories, such as David Walliams' (2008) *The Boy in the Dress*. This issue is one of expressionism rather than gendered neutrality. This study will investigate how the philosophy of gender is reflected in schools' policies to allow individual gendered expression and promote tolerance towards others.

2.1.8 Formation of binary gendered power relations

Walkerdine's (1981) observational nursery study explored the position of girls and women within education systems, and the notion of repressive relations where children are regarded as institutionally powerless in contrast to the Foucauldian concept of power production. Power is not held by one particular group over another powerless one, but is conceived as immanent in all encounters (Foucault, 1995:186). Her study demonstrated Foucault's (1980a) theory that the relationship of power and resistance is constantly reproduced, in continual struggle and constantly shifting. So, while children can be construed as the powerless objects of adult discourse, they also have subject positions available to them that can resist such a move. Walkerdine (1981) noted the importance of observing nursery boys as well as girls when considering power, control and equal opportunities. She observed how a girl, Annie, took a piece of Lego from a boy, Terry, and resisted his request to give it back. The scenario quickly escalated with Terry initially using sexist language against her; then being joined by another boy, Sean, in using sexist and violent language against the teacher (op. cit.:208):

Terry: You're a stupid cunt, Annie.

The teacher instructs him to stop, and also Sean who is busy messing up other children's constructions.

Sean: Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter.

Terry: Get out of it knickers Miss Baxter.

Sean: Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter.

Terry: Get out of it Miss Baxter the knickers paxter knickers, bum.

Sean: Knickers, shit, bum.

Miss B: Sean, that's enough, you're being silly.

Sean: Miss Baxter, knickers, show your knickers.

Terry: Miss Baxter, shit Miss Baxter.

Sean: Miss Baxter, show your knickers your bum off.

Sean: Take all your clothes off, your bra off.

Terry: Yeah, and take your bum off, take your wee-wee off, take your clothes, your mouth off.

Sean: Take your teeth out, take your head off, take your hair off, take your bum off. Miss Baxter the paxter knickers taxter.

Miss B: Sean, go and find something else to do please.

By effecting a sexist discourse, they disempowered the teacher while empowering themselves in order to establish male superiority. This extract shows that far from being free agents the boys were positioned in another discourse, one of sexism. By opening up space in the classroom for children to engage and interact with fairy tales in unique ways, progressive discourses can be debated that are not contingent upon gender difference but similarities.

2.1.9 Limitations of sexism towards equality and openness

This study will consider the gender balance of teaching role models for children to transcend masculine-feminine dichotomies. Biddulph (1997) and Skelton (2002:91) discussed the challenge of boys' underachievement and the 'feminisation of schooling' with only 15% male nursery and primary teachers. Boustead, joint general secretary of the *National Education Union* (cited in FitzPatrick, 2019), blamed the skewed ratio directly on patriarchal sexism: 'Men are put off by the idea that they're supposedly not meant to work in jobs involving children, which is old-fashioned thinking that we need to move beyond'.

Saletan (2011) testified that the fear of sexism has produced a bias against acknowledged physiological sex differences, which gets in the way of frank discussion and exploration. Due to a cultural consensus, the brothers Grimm dropped the sexual elements from their original fairy tales, regarding information about sex as unsuitable for the young. It is important to note that the theme of violence remained and, if anything, increased to emphasise retribution. Controversially, Quinn (2019) reported that Phelps, a screenwriter and producer, believed it was empowering to see the alternative violent side of women and expose their darker and secret sides. Although it is imperative to highlight misogynistic brutality against women, it is necessary to shift the social norm of the traditional gender dualism of the male aggressor and the female victim.

Sexuality has become culturally regarded as the antithesis of the state of childhood innocence, the defining characteristic of a 'normal' child. Protection of children from sexual abuse is a particular social concern, and Levine (2002:181) showed that within this context it has become a focus for intense risk anxiety within schools. Blaise (2013:804) revealed that early childhood teachers are often reluctant to engage with ideas around sexuality for fear of being classed as a 'bad' teacher, which only further contributes to the role they play in the moral panic discourse. Tesar *et al.* (2016:228) pointed out the danger of the trope 'one true childhood' that far from opening up spaces for children to imaginatively invent criteria, closes off creative play. As regards resources, Pullman (2017:15-16) considered the issue about whether children's books should address matters like sex, violence, abortion or child abuse and the need of children to be able to find these in stories, especially as they already know about these things. He concluded that whatever people may think or whatever stories may depict, it is important to show that actions have consequences. This study will consider the language and themes of physical violence and verbal abuse, and how these associated gender behaviours can be positively adapted and realistically perceived in order to encourage respect and equality.

2.2 The influence of symbolic tools on relationships, emotional expression and imagination.

2.2.1 Cultural consciousness and gender terminology

Young children learn to talk and talk to learn, and these conversations provide the framework to explore gender and relationships. As Vygotsky (1978) recognised, the connections between learning and the development of higher-level cognitive processes in children are supported by cultural tools, such as language and story symbolism. The practices of oral storytelling, story reading and critical story discussions are thus significant literacy tools in supporting children's development of linguistic and cognitive abilities. In fairy tales, the use of repetitive symbolism and metaphors are the key to their interpretation and understanding of character expectations. This study will explore how the storytelling approaches can effectively scaffold children's critical listening and discourses to develop imaginative responses towards reiterative and repressive gendered symbolism. In accordance with Vygotsky's levels of child development, Nelson (2007:174) proposed that children's narrative consciousness usually occurs at around four years old when they have become well practised in constructing and reflecting upon their own personal narratives. This is another reason for conducting this study with children aged 4 to 6 years old, and for determining how this reflective ability will support their comprehension and learning.

According to Munson *et al.* (2015), a child's gender can be detected in their speech from the age of 5. His study with boys aged between 5 and 13 repudiated the theories of language acquisition that until recently have suggested that early in life children do not select who they try to copy, but come up with a general combination of what they have listened to. His evidence suggested that children do pick and choose from the people they encounter during their language acquisition phase and who they come to imitate. The language they absorb is pervasive, and seemingly subtle variations can convey significant social meanings learnt from an early age. Children's use of gendered terminology will be investigated in this study.

2.2.2 Manipulation of gendered symbolism

Vygotsky (1978) observed that children drew from their entire symbolic repertoire in order to interpret the symbols of a story. Moreover, Rogoff (2003:14) clarified how cultural symbolic systems are often unquestioningly absorbed into the early reading life of the child. This docile stance is important to note, especially as Holland (2003)

observed that young children are 'struggling to make sense of what it means to be a boy or a girl....in the process of forming gender identity...trying to find...rules that will make them feel that they belong in the gendered world that surrounds them' (op. cit.:19). Readers will notice even in this research there is reference to powerful stereotypical gendered metaphors; in Donaldson's (2016) *Zog*, the nurse is called 'Princess Pearl' as opposed to the Knight, 'Sir Gadabout the Great'. Symbolism, including the use of metaphor, creates the potential for society to control meaning through the accepted and desirable ways of thinking and valuing. These shared narrative contexts coupled with 'canonical images' influence the way that what is read is understood. Richards (cited in Waller *et al.*, 2011:29) explained how Bruner used this phrase to describe embedded stereotypical ways of thinking, being and acting. Pullman (2017) referred to the symbolic images and traditional metaphors as 'touchstones' which possess a strange fertility as they are used over and over again in fairy tales, reflecting the power of the symbolic image to shape meaning and interpretations. This study will examine the significance of symbolism towards the formation of the children's gendered identity.

Coates (2002:23) in her study examining story symbolism woven into 3- to 7-year-old children's drawings from free choice activities, observed the self and peer talk during this time. She discovered that the adults rarely paid attention to the content of this talk when children are drawing. Coates (op. cit.) felt this was an opportunity missed, since this talk can help to elucidate appropriate intervention strategies to support children's cognitive progression. Coates and Coates (2006:222; 2016) noted how teachers focused more on the cognitive developmental aspects and end product of the drawing, often to the detriment of children's creative responses. With the understanding that stories and creative activities can illuminate cognitive thought processes, this study will consider how the approach supports children to think imaginatively about gender roles.

2.2.3 Dialogical conversation

The dialogic relationship between textual language and illustrations in picture books promotes an active interrogative role for children. Cole (1996:119) suggested that the interrogation of thought can be complemented by the teacher's role in forming a distinctive triadic relationship: the educator, the story/author and the reader. Wells (2009:176) noted that it was not only listening to stories that helped the children to develop a certain amount of control over language, but a great deal depended on

the sort of stories that were read and the talk that accompanied or followed a reading. This was reiterated by Mello's (2001) research with a class of 9- to 10-year-olds over a whole school year, revealing that combining story-listening with post-telling discussions notably enhanced pupils' ability to reflexively de-construct their gendered value systems and positions. Isbell *et al.*'s (2004:158–159) study on the benefit of storytelling with 3- to 5-year-old children, advocated that open-mindedness was the most effective way to develop thinking skills. The thinking skills being those that go beyond stereotypical gendered messages and scripts; those that involve analysing the information in the story in order to make decisions about its truth, authenticity and relevance. Pullman (2012) claimed that the most enriching experience is the critical conversation that arises from the sharing of stories. Faulkner (cited in Cremin *et al.* 2016:94) explained this is because speech and language can play a mediating role between the private consciousness of one's own thoughts and feelings and the public mindfulness of the thoughts and feelings of others. When storytelling is combined with judicious listening, questioning and retelling strategies, reading comprehension skills at the literal, inferential and critical levels can be developed. I will examine this notion of the conversation that supports the development of the critical consciousness by considering the children's reaction to stories, and the mediating role of the researcher extending their responses.

Maguire's (1985) study established that reading stories created a perfect opportunity for adults and children to spend quality time together, which further enabled children to develop a greater cognitive conceptual understanding. Significantly, Maguire (*op. cit.*) recognised the concern that the absorption of digital media reduced the ability of children to predict, listen, play and think in words, decode symbols and exercise their minds imaginatively. Building upon Maguire's findings, I began the series of story sessions with a picture book with fewer words and on subsequent occasions used books with more words and fewer corresponding pictures. This approach was aimed at encouraging greater symbolic thinking, richer creative responses and more articulate interpretations from the children.

2.2.4 Ethics of justice and care

Jung (1915; 1969) believed that fairy tales encapsulate a collective unconsciousness comprised more or less of universal beliefs and behaviours in all individuals, often taking the form of stereotypes that lead to gender norms. In this

study, gender norms, such as *nice* girl and *bad* boy, are regarded as 'features of a collective life' (Pearce and Connell, 2016:34) that act as exemplars to other members of a group or society as to how they should behave. Gilligan's (1982:xix) moral development studies indicated that gender relational codes were based upon polarised images of self which determined whether the ethics of fairness or care are chosen. Both genders have the capacity to see ethical issues from the two perspectives, but they tend to select one focus or the other depending on how they perceive themselves. The ethic of justice can be distinguished from the ethic of care by the quantity and quality of relationships. The ethical goals of individual rights, equality before the law and fair play, can all be pursued without personal ties to others. Whereas sensitivity to others, responsibility, self-sacrifice and peace-making all reflect interpersonal involvement and connection, as Walkerdine (1984) observed. Women's need for relationships, for instance, is due to the distinct feminine identity formed during their early years, and this in turn leads to the ethic of care.

Gilligan (1982:42) noted the relationship of the gendered ethical approaches to the relational patterns of connectedness. The average adult male has a wide circle of friendly relations, but not intimate friends, as intimacy is what they fear. Their stories, from her studies, indicate their cautiousness about entrapment or betrayal, or even being humiliated by rejection or deceit. She observed how the men distinguished themselves from others by their accomplishments, and discussed how their individual climb to the top was often a solitary pursuit. Conversely, women defined themselves by describing their relationships, and equated danger in their lives with isolation and disconnection. Gilligan (op. cit.:xxi) discussed how many tried to avoid disassociation and of being alone at all costs, even if it meant remaining in an abusive friendship or relationship. This state of *minimal resistance* places women and girls in a vulnerable position. This is further exacerbated by the culturally nurtured expectation for perfect temperate relationships, deskilling them from negotiating conflict, tensions and boundaries. Robnett and Susskind's (2010:820) research into 8- to 9-year-old children's friendships showed same-gender favouritism when they allocated more positive traits to their own gender than to the other.

Gilligan (1982:42) noted that these masculine and feminine self-portraits of tough boys and caring girls are consistent with childhood fairy tale protagonists. The common male fantasy figure bravely ventures forth alone on his conquest to slay

the dragon, compared to the female dream of an intimate relationship. Ironically the danger is the development of the opposite of what each gender seeks: boys becoming vulnerable to feelings of isolation through the pressure of stoicism; and girls being 'too nice' by the application of their own self-silencing and self-censorship measures upon themselves that lead to broken or fractured relationships. This has important implications for equality and freedom of speech for all, with the emphasis being directed towards *isegoria*, the right to speak, rather than *parrhesia*, the equal liberty to speak one's mind (Foucault, 1983; BBC, 2020). In many fairy tales, boys are encouraged to be phlegmatic and courageous, qualities necessary for leadership and sovereignty. In contrast, the girls' capitulation to the feminine stereotype means they still are learning to be submissive and self-deprecating: debilitating qualities in a competitive patriarchal society. This study will consider the balance of freedom of speech that contributes to inclusion and diversity against gendered speech restrictions in the storytelling discussions.

2.2.5 Individualistic societies and gendered emotions

Fischer and Manstead's (2000:71-96) study raised an awareness of the relation between gender and emotions in different cultures, such as the Western gender dichotomy with the stereotypical belief that women are naturally more emotional than men. In patriarchal Western cultures, women are found to express positive social emotions, such as empathy, joy and enthusiasm, alongside emotions that imply powerlessness or vulnerability, such as fear, sadness or shame, much more than men (op. cit.:72). The main reason is that these softer emotions pose a threat to the Western conception of masculinity as they denote weakness and a sense of being out of control. In contrast, powerful emotions such as anger, pride, contempt and hubris, are often expressed by men to confirm, or even enhance, their power and social status. Brechet's (2013:378) study with 6- to 8-year-old children discovered that their self-image of gender is initially in flux, which helps them to interpret and imitate emotions. The emotions generated by the gender roles are often embedded in cultural stories, which children are taught to identify with. Mendelsohn *et al.*'s (2018) study with children aged 3 to 5 years, showed that reading stories aloud improved not only their language and early literacy skills, but also could shape their social and emotional development. This study will explore the Western cultural display rules of emotions being expressed, and if these can be become less gender-specific.

2.2.6 Emotional well-being and safety

Bettelheim (1991) observed that parents preferred stories that reflected children's experience of the world as a pleasant place that fulfilled their wishes, as opposed to magical stories that included risk taking or disharmony. In contrast, Phillips (2011:307) believed that fairy tales enable children to learn how to deal with challenging conflicts they might encounter as they grow up. Affirming this, Williams (2014) emphasised that these can help to depict the unfairness of an experience or the emotional frustration of a particular situation, which modern stories often side step. The *National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children* (NSPCC) (2017:1) highlighted how emotional abuse and neglect within families has a long-term negative impact on children, and argued the importance of addressing issues to prevent these harming relationship patterns being adopted. I considered whether fairy tales could support children's safe growth into maturity and help them achieve eudaimonia, which encapsulates the fairy tale 'happily ever after' ending. As Deci and Ryan (2008:2) explained, this kind of ending is about living life in a full and deeply satisfying way; the process of fulfilling one's virtuous potential and living as one was inherently intended to live. Weiss (2008) questioned whether the modern desire for the sanitisation of stories hindered children's ability to look beyond the canonical endings and challenge their beliefs and choices. This study will examine how to encourage an egalitarian understanding of gender roles necessary for equality and eudaimonia, rather than patriarchal dystopia.

2.2.7 Efferent-aesthetic transactions and meaning-making

Rosenblatt's (1938; 1969; 1978) reader response theory proposed that the meaning from a story came from the unique transaction between the reader and the text within the cultural context. Notably, the reader or listener plays an active role in deriving meaning and can adopt different stances on the efferent-aesthetic continuum depending on their understanding. The aesthetic stance involves interpreting the meaning by fusing 'the cognitive and affective elements of consciousness – sensations, images, feelings, ideas – into a personally lived-through poem or story' (Rosenblatt, 1980:388). In contrast, the efferent stance involves extracting the information that is to be carried away from the text. Rosenblatt (1978:37) discussed how some children may not develop the capacity to read aesthetically because of the strong emphasis on efferent storytelling in schools. However, Dawkins (cited in Knapton, 2014) raised the question of whether it was pernicious to instil in a child a view that the world was shaped by

supernaturalism, and asserted that there was a lot of wonder to be found in the efferent science-based world. This study will investigate the meanings negotiated with the story-worlds and the issues around the accessibility of stances for individual children.

2.2.8 Inner storytelling experiences

Steedman's (1982:153) research into three 8-year-old girls' story writing highlighted the importance of children's active participation in the process of their own socialisation to form their own 'system of meanings' rather than simply accepting culturally predefined options. Mallan's (2009) study confirmed that children enter school with previous experiences of stories and cultural gender roles. Fairy tales can provide a *living through* experience, not just a *knowing about* experience (Rosenblatt, 1978). Long (2017) reiterated the movement from the 'storytelling' to the 'story *living*' dimension of stories: that is, those that require personal involvement to provide experiences that truly matter. These are the stories that are unique, authentic and meaningful, and they are the kinds of stories which children can experience on many levels. The living through experience will be encouraged during this study to enable children to make meaningful connections to experiences they may know or that they want to uncover and understand.

2.2.9 Spectator-participant attachments and imaginative responses

Harding's (1962:134; 1967) reader-response theory explained how a reader's or listener's response is dependent on their choice of positioning: whether they choose to *spectate* on events as an onlooker or choose to *participate* using previous values and beliefs to form more immediate judgements. The more detached and less involved experience of spectatorship allows the possibility of building a more widely comprehensive, perceptive and evaluative system of knowledge and understanding. Whereas the participant role, instead of encouraging a full response, usually offers a more rapid and focused interpretation, and this allows the events to be more structured. This distinction of the nature between a reader's onlooker response and participation raises the question about detachment and the '*aesthetic distance*'. Applebee (1978:17-19) argued that most works will demand a mix, rather than any necessity to choose between them. This study will explore the children's participant-spectatorship responses generated from the meaning of the stories.

Iser (1980:42-43) emphasised how the interpretation of the story's message was a two-way process, and was 'not a definable entity but, if anything a dynamic happening'. The story's gaps or blanks provide the impetus for the children to creatively fill them with their imaginations. The reader-listener 'is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning' (op. cit.:111). Rosen (2018:20) believed that fairy tales which contain reveal-conceal devices and begin with the refrain 'Once upon a time...', are all-important for hooking children's interest. He argued they encourage children to imaginatively apply their own lives and leaps of imagination to their interpretation of the story. An illustration of this is Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are* with the use of 'someone' in the sentence:

'And Max, the king of all wild things, was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all.'

Furthermore, Rosen (2018) commented how the storyline followed the Freudian model of need, a 'personalised focusing on the prime relationships of boys with their mothers and girls with their fathers'. These ideological views become embedded unless challenged, as he explained, 'the rest of life is determined by this 'prime' relationship and how it is played out in our lives when we are under five' (op. cit.:53). Rowe (2005:16) postulated that whom we love is often political. She considered the relational notion of subjectivities, and suggested that our various (be)longings form at the moment of our birth, possibly even well before. Power is transmitted through these relationship ties, and all these connections support its function and transference. The use of imaginative interpretations and gap-filling will be investigated in this study, and the politics of power relations and self-worth attached to family roles will be discussed.

2.3 The challenge of confronting cultural perceptions of gendered identity

2.3.1 Social role theory

Subversion, as a strategy for destabilising gender, is often used in children's picture books. However, Davies (1989:29) found this approach to be ineffective when she researched the social and psychological construction of gendered subjectivity that young children displayed when feminist stories attempted to subvert the traditional

social-symbolic discursive order. Davies (op. cit.:59–60) carried out her initial research with eight 4- to 5-year-olds before increasing this number to forty. The alternative stories selected deliberately inverted and confused the stereotypical gender traits of characters, narrative structure and resolution, to introduce progressive cultural perspectives. She asserted that stories, such as Munsch's (1980) *The Paper Bag Princess*, pose a challenge to children's gendered identity, which causes them to resist due to the conflict it creates with their own known identity. Her findings indicated that sex-role socialisation normalises hegemonic masculinity, with its authority and power relations dependent on the preservation of a limited and subjugated position of femininity. Davies (1989:86) stressed that: 'Even when girls resist typical feminine positionings, they nonetheless learn the patterns of power and desire through which male-female relations are organised' (cited in McLeod, 1993:110). Davies (1989:2) suggested that it is the power of the dominant discourses that trap children within conventional meanings and traditional modes of being. This study also used *The Paper Bag Princess* to investigate whether children's views have become post-gendered thirty years on, and to further extend understanding of how subversive fairy tales can successfully address the gender borderline in a society that is more diversely structured. It examined whether blending masculine and feminine attributes within one protagonist might form the basis of a literary pedagogical strategy for critical thinking.

McCabe *et al.*'s (2011:198) study analysed the gendered roles contained in the titles and the central characters in 5,618 children's books published between 1900 and 2000; they found that there was a great gendered imbalance. They discovered that compared to females, males were represented almost twice as often in titles and 1.6 times as often as central characters. Lifting Limits (2018), a charity-based gender equality organisation, replicated similar findings, and in addition reported male characters outnumbered female characters in more than half the books, whilst females outnumbered male characters in less than a fifth. In Favilli and Cavallo's (cited in Saner, 2017) study of 5,000 children's books, less than 20% featured a woman with a profession. Books such as Pankhurst's (2016) *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World*, that detailed remarkable achievements of women in history are gradually being published; at their book readings, Favilli and Cavallo (cited in Saner, 2017) observed how children of both genders were constantly surprised to learn that 'women had done so many things'. In this study, stories were specifically chosen with non-traditional female protagonists to give the children an opportunity to reflect upon gender rules, choices, autonomy and agency.

2.3.2 Co-creation and reconceptualisation of identity

Lee (2016:42) showed that using particular storytelling techniques can successfully give teachers the opportunity to 'blur' gender roles. Paley's (1990:21) helicopter stories are one such technique, which involves using open interactive spaces where children and adults engage in discursive co-constructive narratives using gaze, body, speech and interaction patterns. A teacher scribes a child's story word for word, and then chooses which children are to act it out in front of the class. The stories draw upon the facet of collective meaning-making when they are told, listened to and participated in, and provide a rich context for further narrative co-creation. Similar to Vygotsky, Paley (1990:21-23) observed that an individual's imagination is receptive to all the stimuli in the environment and the ideas that a story generates; the listeners can readily identify with and draw upon them to help shape their story responses. Intent participation and observation of audience reactions advances the listeners' narrative consciousness by allowing them to recognise the stories, themes or storytelling traditions that are more likely to capture and hold their attention. The children's main interest was found to be in learning how to construct narratives that would gain acceptance with their immediate peer group. Faulkner (2016:87) noted that learning through observation and listening to peers' storytelling facilitated children's symbolic and gendered understanding as it provided easy access to the local cultural knowledge and narrative conventions. This study will explore the ways in which the stories chosen influence the development of children's communal gender identities.

In the creation of Paley's helicopter stories, gender roles became more fluid, with a boy maybe becoming a princess and a girl perhaps ending up as a baddie and racing around in fast cars. *Lifting Limits* (2018) noted that children are seven times more likely to read a story that has a male villain in it than a female baddie. As Butler theorised, Paley's (1990) study showed that gendered subjectivity is not passively internalised; it is actively struggled over. Multiple discourses can offer different subject positions or points of view, especially when some are contradictory or incompatible with one another (Paley, 2005; 2007). In Donaldson's *Zog* (2016), Princess Pearl is shown to have both a stereotypical caring nature and non-stereotypical adventurous leadership qualities. Reconceptualization of identity as an effect that is produced or generated, opens up the additional possibilities of self-determination, agency, subversion and mobility (Paley, 1990:147). The process of challenging cultural stereotypes begins with children's experiences and personal identity constructions. This study will incorporate Paley's collaborative approach;

however, it will focus more on post-storytelling discussions and activities rather than the actual story making.

2.3.3 Parental influence and engagement

In the UK, more than 10,000 new children's books are published every year (Kloet, 2019). The *2013 Bowker Report* (Emmett, 2016) on the United Kingdom, United States and Canadian children's book market showed that 84% of the picture book buyers were female. Many of the books being chosen for children by adult women are often those they enjoyed when they were young; in other words, books that might be reinforcing older ideas of gender stereotypes. Emmett (2016) argued that this might have been an influencing factor in the skewed gender appeal of picture book industry production. The publishing industry is beginning to reform with books, such as Kemp's (2018) *The Good Guys* which presents stories about men who have shown that changing the world does not require a sword or a corporate jet. Equally Brooks (2018), *Stories for Boys who Dare to be Different*, introduces boys to the valuable notion of pursuing traditionally non-masculine pursuits. This is partly due to the era of 'toxic masculinity', reflected in the rise of feminist movements, such as #MeToo, #Times Up and *Orange the World: #HearMeToo*, combined with the crisis in male mental health. Hinsliff (2019) reported that Hollywood is starting to reflect a broader concept of masculinity, with the Marvel-Disney *Spiderman* film encompassing an alternative beta-male vision of heroism. This study will investigate the stories parents and teachers enjoy sharing with the children, and what cultural aspects influence their choice.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

The literature examined in this review helped to frame my central question: "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?". In particular, it has shown that there are many historical, societal and inter-generational family messages imbued in fairy tales that affect the association between gender, culture and power relations; the influence of symbolic cultural tools on relationships, emotional expression and imagination; and the challenge of confronting cultural perceptions of gendered identity. Four additional research questions were then drawn up to provide a framework to answer the main question:

1. Which dominant discourses did the children raise concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations?

Drawing upon Foucault's (1980;1995) notion of biopower and docile bodies and Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity, the boundaries that fairy tale characters inhabit are further complicated due to the fact they are often ambiguous, judgemental and restrictive. I aimed to explore the effectiveness of the story discussions to challenge self-limiting stances and inspire agency and choice, as well the regimes of truth and knowledge about gender roles that are being perpetuated and governed.

2. Which symbolic cultural influences in the fairy tales did the children identify with?

The research studies, particularly Vygotsky's educational theory, indicated that the storytelling approaches adopted, the language used and the social context, determined the effectiveness of the dialogical discussion to present imaginative and creative responses. In respect of the polarised gendered ethics, as Gilligan's (1982) theory proposed, I sought to discover whether fairy tales can provide opportunities for children to develop emotional intelligence and growth, to enable them to navigate relational conflict and to find the courage needed to take emotional risks. Specifically, I planned to understand to what extent young children drew on their personal perceptions and story memories to make the experience meaningful.

3. How did the children critically respond to alternative gendered role models and acts?

Having examined Davies' (1989) and Paley's (1980) research literature on fairy tales and the gender stereotypes they contained, I chose to study young children's responses to non-traditional female protagonists and their struggle for autonomy and agency. I intended to establish their flexibility towards, and acceptance of, alternative and subversive role models and the effects these might have on their gendered attitudes, behaviours and relationships. In addition, I sought to investigate parents' and teachers' responses to progressive story characters, and to determine the cultural value that they attached to them.

4. How did the research participants respond to a gender-neutral storytelling approaches?

Following Clarricoates' (1978) exposure of unconscious teacher bias and Walkerdine's (1981) observation of sexism within the classroom, I wished to explore

the context of the storytelling experience: the children's resistance, the views of parents and teachers, the classroom environment and the school policies on gender equality.

From the research evidence gained in response to these research questions, I planned to determine whether the storytelling discussions could enhance children's development of a critical mindset and ability to pose challenging questions about gender through the use of fairy tales. The following chapter will consider how traditional qualitative methods and multimodal Mosaic approaches were employed in this study to investigate these research enquiries, with the use of critical reflexivity and interpretative thematic strategies for analysis.

3 Methodology

The literature review clarified the research question: “How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?”. To support the central investigation four further empirical questions arose and were defined as follows:

1. Which dominant discourses did the children raise concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations?
2. Which symbolic cultural influences in the fairy tales did the children identify with?
3. How did the children critically respond to alternative gendered role models and acts?
4. How did the research participants respond to a gender-neutral storytelling approaches?

In this chapter I will discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this qualitative interpretative study, and the use of the child-led Mosaic approach, to investigate the subjective meaning-making and perspectives of the participants. Ethical issues of participation and consent will be considered, and validity and reliability will be explored throughout to ensure credibility and dependability. I will examine the multimodal languages that the child-participants were encouraged to utilise during the research, including story discussions, drawing, puppeteering and role play, alongside the adults’ responses and school policies. I will consider my role as participant researcher in conjunction with the interpretation of the data and theory generation by investigating researcher bias and employing critical reflexivity. Finally, I will review the thematic inductive analysis from the data collection to answer the central research question.

3.1 Qualitative theoretical assumptions

Research studies on gender identity and emotional expression in early childhood are valuable, Tan and Gibson (2017:295) determined, as enquiries into how young children understand and conceive their early learning experiences are somewhat limited. This may be due in part to the assumption that issues of access and representation are more problematic in research with young children than with older children or adults, or because young children often do not rely so heavily on verbal or written forms of communication. Drawing upon the participatory aspect to critically address children’s perceptions of gender norms, this research mainly

utilised qualitative methods that included interpretative and post-structuralist paradigms.

Palaiologou (2014:690) declared the key aspect in conducting gendered research is to allow for plurality, difference and diversity, rather than a narrow mono-layered perception. The ontological view of this gender study was theorised as subjective, involving multiple perspectives (Lichtman, 2011:14) with 'unique participant meanings' (Creswell, 2007:39). In other words, everyone has their own version of reality that can make one see things differently to others. The epistemological perspective adopted was a naturalist anti-positivist one, which considers language and knowledge of gender as unique and personal. Reflecting upon and deepening one's view of reality draws upon the essence of critical thinking and philosophising. This study's theoretical assumptions were based upon the hermeneutic phenomenological understanding of children as 'social actors' who are capable of creatively influencing their own lives (Bruner and Haste, 1990:59). The interpretative paradigm was designed to make sense of and interpret the perceptions others had about gender (op. cit.:21). Hartas (2010) added that according to interpretivism, inquiry about reality is closely linked to our own knowledge and experiences when trying to understand ourselves, others and the world. Therefore, the axiology contained in the interpretative process of inquiry and analysis will unavoidably include researcher's bias, as well as that of the participants.

This study incorporated the poststructuralist paradigm to understand the social reality of participants' gendered experiences. Cohen *et al.* (2011:28) detailed how the poststructuralist paradigm challenges sociopolitical structures that legitimise knowledge and social reproduction, such as patriarchy. The philosophy of poststructuralism considers knowledge as intertwined with social, economic and political structures, resulting in a multi-perspective examination of social structures and discourses. Following Foucault's notion, Hartas (2010:41) discerned that the cornerstone of poststructuralist knowledge is the understanding that interpretations are not absolute truths, and that the knowledge obtained is shaped partly by the researcher's own values. Thus, language was not considered neutral in this study as it was regarded as 'both carrier and creator of a culture's epistemological codes' (op. cit.:48). Thematic inductive rather than deductive reasoning was adopted in this study, involving *a priori* theorising towards themes, suggestions of causation and theory generation. The evidence-based analysis aimed to gain deeper

understandings of children's multiple lived gender experiences to support equality of opportunities and egalitarian relationships.

3.2 The Mosaic approach

Following my pilot case study (Appendix 1), the Mosaic approach was chosen as it incorporates simpler multisensory methods that can access younger children's emotional and symbolic expression and understanding. The multi-method Mosaic approach was devised by Alison Clark and Peter Moss (2001), both of whom had been inspired by the creative art-based curriculum of the *Reggio Emilia* Italian preschools. It is a child-centred methodology that proactively encourages multimodal communication by the use of the eclectic technique. The eclectic technique involves the employment of participatory verbal and literary visual tools alongside traditional qualitative research methods, semi-structured questionnaires and interviews (Clark *et al.* 2005:47). Children are not a homogenous group and their preferences for different methods vary as do their competencies, ways of communicating and researcher-participant relationships. The participatory tools the Mosaic approach offers help to facilitate the research process, particularly for young children who are most often the least powerful and visible in schools and society. Communicating in a monomodal manner can present obstacles rather than tools for them, especially as their speech is still developing. The multimodal technique is founded on and around the needs and interests of children as they naturally develop through creative activities. In so doing, a more equitable reality of the meaning of childhood can be gained and the establishment of the children's degree of investment with associated issues, such as gendered identity and expectations. Following the Vygotskian tradition, the perspectives of the children's parents and teachers were included in this study as children's views and behaviours are rarely isolated, but part of a wider socio-cultural context that interweaves within complex social and institutional constructs.

Baird (2015:36) noted how participatory methods draw upon the notion of listening to 'the hundred languages of children'; in other words, the variety of ways children express their thoughts, ideas and creativity. By co-participating with children, this approach supported Isbell *et al.*'s (2004) and Wells' (2009) earlier research on listening with children (Chapter 2.2.3). Listening and the power differential of the participants is often problematic, with tokenistic listening only reinforcing differences of power and status. During the research I ensured that an ongoing analysis of the

way that power relations operated in the storytelling research was central to the listening agenda. Working within a participatory paradigm facilitated children’s direct involvement and agency in the co-construction of meanings and the creation of ideas which followed the Vygotskian model, rather than through knowledge extraction and verification of theories. This was an important element in the study when considering alternative and subversive fairy tale protagonists and transformative acts.

The meaning-making in this multimodal communication and literary research included the study of different modes of expression, which contributed towards co-constructed media and meaning. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001:22) defined modes as abstract, non-material resources of meaning-making, and media as the specific tools and material forms in which the modes are realised. Multimediality reduces the possibility of material being condensed into a two-dimensional verbal account, (Table 3.1).

<i>Story modes</i>		<i>Multimodal strategies and media tools</i>
<i>Storyteller (researcher)</i>	<i>Children</i>	
Language	Listening	Storytelling discussions
Action and movement	Language	Storytelling illustrations
Illustrations	Vocabulary	Drawing
Dramatic story sound effects	Visualisation	Model Making
Listening	Image	Role Playing
Expression	Size	Puppeteering
Emotions	Colour	Audio-recording
	Emotions	Using story props
	Facial expression	
	Action and movement	
	Singing	
	Thinking	
	Natural connections	
	Efferent connections	

Table 3.1. Story modes and multimodal language strategies and media tools.

Jewitt *et al.* (2009:11) explained that communication occurs through the different but synchronous modes to form empirical definitions of multimodality. The interactions between modes, media and semiotic resources can be potentially extremely complex, with an inherent danger of sensory overload. Clark (2011) linked the

multisensory nature of children's communicative cultures to the materiality of their learning environments and the different understandings of the perceptions between adults and children. In this study, an awareness of materiality was important in determining children's lived experiences of gender in their early childhood environments. The fairy tale resources offered possibilities for researching understandings and meanings, and provided a means of communication with myself as participant-researcher. This study focused on the interpretative and exploratory processing, during which time critical thinking was made visible through language and the multimodal communication strategies.

3.3 Participants

3.3.1 Setting

Due to the limited resources for the research and with myself as a lone researcher, the study was directed towards an in-depth treatment of a small number of cases to gain more detailed insights. The study was conducted in three state infant schools, comprising of two Church of England schools and one Local Education Authority (LEA) school, and a private WS kindergarten.

The three state infant departments were located in the same LEA and similar demographic areas: predominantly white communities with 10% ethnic minority, consisting mostly of middle-income families and non-working parents. The WS kindergarten was located in an adjacent education county and had a different socio-economic demographic compared to the state schools, as many of the parents came from all over Europe: Germany, Poland, Cyprus, Holland and Ireland. The small Steiner EY group was held in a rural village hall as formal Steiner education begins at age seven. The first WS school was founded in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919 (Selg, 2010:12) and Ashdown Forest, England in 1925, with a story-based curriculum (Steiner, 1995:31) which is the reason it was chosen for this literary focused study. There are currently over two thousand Waldorf Steiner EY settings worldwide, thirty-five in the UK and Ireland. In European countries WS education is state funded, except in the UK where only four are state-funded (Pappano, 2011). The WS teachers believe that the art of oral storytelling is a keystone in the education and development of young children's physical and etheric bodies, and that word-of-mouth narration cannot be replaced by simple reading (Steiner, 1996:25). Children need the truths embedded in fairy tales to embrace their hearts and souls, and to liberate them from the constrictions of the outer world (op. cit.:87).

In their view, children's minds are to be kept as open as possible, free from fixed printed images and digital media. In the kindergarten, the WS teachers told mostly simple nature stories and fairy tales, but refrained from using those with challenging moral choices or alternative gendered perceptions and even 'happily ever afters'. During storytelling the children were expected to listen quietly without interrupting or any explanations, as Meyer (2013:17) instructed. Teachers and parents were only to answer the questions a child raised at a later time. This didactic approach discourages children from developing critical responses, as Vygotsky (1978) argued. I observed that it was only in the children's free play that normalised gender acts were performed and resisted, with the emphasis of play on reality.

The state schools were overseen in slightly different ways: two schools were managed by the head and governing body, the other was part of an academy directed by a tertiary head. I also had parental, and professional associations in the past with the schools: one as a parent and Foundation Governor, another as a parent and one through a professional association. In the WS kindergarten, there was no hierarchical arrangement of educational management as everyone was viewed as an equal and worked collaboratively. I had no prior association or experience with this school.

3.3.2 School sample

From the initial negotiations and discussions with the schools, it was agreed to involve the children as active participants and co-researchers in this study. This research also investigated teachers' and parents' views and storytelling practices as Vygotsky's MKOs, and examined how these impacted upon children's gendered interpretations and understandings. Initially I had planned to observe the teachers, but the state school teachers were extremely nervous and reticent about being observed in the classroom. This may have been due to the fact that observation is generally aimed at assessment of performance, with decisions such as tenure and promotions based on the outcomes. I thus presented myself as observer-researcher to all the participants in the schools. This role reduced the ethical complexity of working with such young children, but hindered the rapport and the interactions I could observe. Similarly, I had planned to interview parents at schools, but it was only at the WS school where this was possible, due partly to the direct contact and trust I had developed with the research participants.

3.3.3 Group sample

Creswell (2007) defined 'purposeful sampling' as where the participants can 'purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem' (op. cit.:125). The children in the schools and kindergarten chosen were mostly British or European, and thus had similar cultural backgrounds to those of the fairy tales being shared. This study investigated two reception classes with 4- to 5-year-olds (schools A and B), and a year one class with 5- to 6-year-olds (school C). The year one class was due to school C's concern about their reception children's competency to comprehend and articulate their feelings. Charles and Boyle (2014) explain that literacy and gendered understanding in educational contexts are often regarded as motor skills and not as a complex social, cultural and creative activity as Vygotsky (1978) theorised. Due to the flexibility of the Mosaic approach it was co-decided that the study could be conducted with the younger pupils in year one to ensure the children's responses were comparable. Einarsdóttir (2007:207) stated that 'Researchers who conduct research with children have to be creative and use methods that fit the circumstances and the children they are working with each time'. In contrast, due to the WS ethos 'to be all inclusive', the study included kindergarten children with ages ranging from 3 to 6 years old. The storytelling discussions were arranged during the morning in the schools, although they were staggered over the term due to other curriculum commitments.

Lewis' (1992:435) research indicated that a group of around six is an optimum size with children, which facilitates fuller responses. Merewether and Fleet (2014:903) added that they assisted the social construction of knowledge allowing the possibility for each child to respond to the thoughts of others. Thus, within the three state school classes I selected eighteen small groups and elected to work with them over a set period of six sessions. Three groups of six children were investigated in each setting: two single-sex groups and a mixed group of three boys and three girls to ensure an equal gender representation. I chose single-sex and mixed-sex groups to act as comparators, and to determine the cultural and gendered influences on their responses. In the private kindergarten, due to the small number of children, I worked with only one mixed-sex group of children.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The participation of young children as subjects in research is complex and requires critical contemplation and responsible ethical judgement. At the beginning of the

research consideration was given to the overlapping layers of ethical matters, including intersubjectivity, indivisibility, phronesis and parsimony, as Palaiologou (2014) recommended.

Intersubjectivity. This foundation layer was related to the procedures for reaching agreement amongst all those involved in the research project. Reference was made to the standard ethical guidelines (*National Children's Bureau, 2002, 2003; British Psychological Association, 2009; BERA, 2011*). A letter explaining the aims and approaches of the study was initially sent to the headteachers requesting permission to conduct the study in their school (Appendix 2). With the headteachers' consent, a letter was then sent to the parents of all the children, inviting consent for their children to participate in the research activities (Appendix 7). Further separate letters requesting informed consent and participation were sent to the children's teachers (Appendix 4) and parents (Appendix 7) to invite them to fill in the research questionnaires and to take part in the subsequent interviews. I always asked the children to assent either verbally to each activity or draw a smiley face as a mark of their agreement or disagreement. Any non-verbal actions and gestures indicating they no longer wished to take part I acknowledged and respected, similarly with all participants. The children's views were filtered through the research design and the interpretative tools employed as recommended by articles 12 and 13 from the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (1989). Following the *University of Warwick Code of Practice* (2019), any research data gathered, including that from the parents' and teachers' questionnaires and interview transcripts, would be stored for ten years and then destroyed.

Indivisibility. This layer of ethical praxis focused on the legitimisation and value of the research inquiry in terms of the nature of the knowledge being sought and its value to beneficiaries. In the children's discussion groups and parents' and teachers' questionnaires and interviews, I ensured that the transformative and emancipatory purpose of the research was kept by clearly asking the most suitable questions to prompt the most appropriate participant responses, as recommended by Cohen *et al.* (2011:379).

Phronesis. This ethical layer is derived from the Aristotelian concept of phronesis; the value of practical thought and practice. Dahlberg and Moss (2005:79) referred to Levinas' 'ethics of encounter' and suggested that interaction with children should be

based on a respect for the difference and unknowability of others. As the researcher I continually acknowledged the children's own subjectivities and consciously set aside my own adult perspectives in an attempt to view the world through their eyes. Clark and Moss (2005) felt that in order to genuinely seek the child's perspective, the researcher needed to position themselves not as an expert, but as the authentic novice. The latter was the opposite to my role as a MKO, and which I overcame, where possible, by working as a co-participant (Section 3.7.2).

Parsimony. This ethical layer determined what needed to be included or excluded in the scope of the research study. Ethical research with young children needs to have the flexibility to exercise omissions or make additions to methods without fearing that this will reduce its viability and validity. The story-based curriculum at the WS school differed considerably from that of the Piagetian state schools' level structured curriculum and assessment, and because of this their engagement with the study was somewhat different. Storytime was encompassed in the daily rhythm of the weekly cycle which was designed to flow at the children's pace. In a candle-lit circle, the session would begin and end with a familiar story-time refrain, and the adult would share the story in a hushed tone. No critical questions were to be encouraged or presented by the teachers so as to allow for an uninterrupted overnight absorption of the essence of the story. The parts that were remembered the next day, they believed were the particular meaningful elements for that child. For these reasons, I gave pragmatic consideration to the nature of the research data gathered.

3.5 Children's perspectives

3.5.1 Written observations

I began my study with highly detailed and descriptive written observations, which Merriam (2009:128) maintained are an important starting point for listening to young children's perspectives (Appendix 3). In determining "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?", I noted the dominant opinions in comments and questions they raised concerning gender issues under the four sub-questions. The observational research field notes were recorded in a reflective research journal, which was brightly coloured and attracted the children's curiosity and interest. This provided a valuable vehicle for explaining what the research was about, and created opportunities for dialogue about each of our observations. Clark *et al.* (2003:30) argued that the advantage of participant

observation is that 'part of the agency can be shared with the child' and this reduces the influence of the researcher. This strategy of critical reflection, as Fook and Gardner (2007) discussed, promotes the philosophy of 'letting go', and I found it allowed participants to see aspects of phenomena that they had not anticipated or been aware of explicitly.

3.5.2 Conference and discussion groups

The child conference groups provided another piece of the multimodal mosaic. The duration of the storytelling was fifteen minutes and I allocated a further fifteen minutes for the storytelling activities. I incorporated the critical thinking and book talk strategies into my research as stories and picture-books are life-like, but at the same time different enough to highlight gender aspects of 'reality'. The pre-planned questions presented in Chapter 4 are merely indicative, as I adjusted my language according to the understanding of the children when asking them about the features and the characters in the stories. Another researcher story strategy used to elicit a critical gendered response was the projection technique, as suggested by Greig and Taylor (1999:132–3). Here, instead of asking direct questions I presented the children with Goldstein's (2008) image of *Red* (Fig. 5.32), which helped to reduce the possibility of a biased answer where the participant-respondent may be looking for cues as to how to respond. I will discuss the implication of children's responses to *Red* in more detail (Chapter 5.4.1). Other projection techniques included the use of a dragon puppet requiring the participant-respondent comments, such as 'What is happening?' 'What could be done here?' and 'Guess who?' (which character fits a particular description) technique. Remer and Tzuriel (2015) stated that an egalitarian conversation with a puppet minimised the element of power relations and control. I thought carefully about the question structure needed to enable the children to hypothesise and theorise about gender and story stereotypes.

Advantages. I chose group conferencing with the children as it encourages meaningful interaction between the group rather than simply eliciting a response to an adult's question, as Hoffman (2010:13) found. Christensen (2004) advocated, in relation to respecting children's 'cultures of communication', the provision of space to allow themes and issues they wished to discuss to be raised, but also to debate matters in their own ways. Clark (2010) found that conversations with young children are often more successful when held in places of their choosing or on the move, such as in play. In this study, the storytelling initially involved listening to the

story whilst we all were seated at the same level, and then the children moved around freely in the activity part of the session. I sought the permission from the children to audio-record the sessions as a historical record, and it indicated that they were being listened to and being heard.

Limitations. Bragg *et al.* (2011:10) cautioned that there are difficulties in interviewing children, such as the influence of peer relations, which I monitored to establish if they were enabling or constraining. Thomson (2007:496) emphasised how previous research has shown that a familiarisation period allows the children to get to know who the researcher is, without seeing them as adults actively engaging in and influencing their school life. A familiarisation session was only actively encouraged in the WS setting, and it was suggested that I stay for a whole day rather than a brief visit.

3.5.3 Transcriptions

Hartas (2010:297) stressed that inevitably when transcribing both children's conference group discussions and teacher interviews, there would be some data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity from the original encounter. I transcribed the transcripts verbatim and combined my observation notes to minimise data loss and provide a fuller record of the context and cues that occurred. Scheurich (1995:240) suggested that transcripts are not necessarily as solid as the conversations were in the social setting of the interview. Even the conventional procedures can lack reliability, as holding constant the questions, the interviewer, the interviewee, the place and time does not guarantee stable, unambiguous and unbiased data. However, the emphasis of the Mosaic approach was on the generative knowledge of ideas which were co-constructed with the participants, increasing the trustworthiness of the findings. The children's real names in the transcripts have been replaced with pseudonyms.

3.5.4 Drawings

The visual art literacy activities used a variety of creative directives based upon the chosen stories, and enabled a non-verbal means to critically respond to characters and themes. For instance, Browne's (2010) *Play the Shape Game*, which he had enjoyed as a young boy with his older brother, allowed the children to create a personal understanding and affiliation with his illustrations that contain striking shapes and lines. The drawings and the children's accompanying narratives were

both seen as integral to the exploration of their perspectives and meaning-making processes of symbolism (Clark, 2010). The children were all extremely proud of their drawings and art work and were keen to show their teachers, demonstrating a desire for their creative ideas and thoughts to be heard. Similar to transcriptions, drawings can be understood to be 'mirrors' to reflect experiences about gender and stereotypes, which can be shared with other members of the community, as Rinaldi (2006:57-58) discussed. Furthermore, reflection was given to the debate about the ethical issues of ownership and authorship of the research documents created. This was overcome by the children photographing their drawings as a record of evidence, and then taking the drawings home.

Einarsdóttir (2007) advised including observations of children's narratives and interpretations as they draw, rather than trying to interpret what they have drawn out of context. Drawing was a valuable way of putting children at ease as it was a familiar activity. Isenberg and Jalongo (2003:106) commented upon visual literacy: 'like language, art is a symbol system that can be used to generate meaning'. While the children created their representations, they were asked to describe them in order to 'record the journey of their constructions of meaning', as Einarsdóttir *et al.* (2009:219) suggested. I not only used this method to ensure that every child's ideas had been included, but also to act as a stimulus to inspire the children to think critically about the fairy tale characters and any gendered symbolism they recognised. It ensured that their perceptions of the art process were used as reliable data, and limited the possibility of placing my interpretation upon them out of context.

3.5.5 Role play

In this study, role-based drama activities that reflected on gender issues, were based upon the themes, characters, mood, conflicts and tensions in the fairy tales. The dramatic work was shaped by the story-text, the researcher-participant and child-participant interactions and the incorporation of objects emphasising the multisensory aspects of the story (Chapter 5.3.3). Role play is valuable for social and literary development because it allows the freedom to co-construct shared contexts of meaning and create discursive spaces which are child-led rather than adult-controlled, thereby building children's literary understanding from multiple perspectives (Broadhead, 2004). Wood and Atfield (2005) raised the issue of gender fairness in role play; they argued that it is never truly free but is always

constrained by the context in which it occurs. The children's reasoning and cognitive flexibility towards alternative gendered roles and perspective were explored in this multimodal study.

Wood and Cook's (2009) study revealed that children play with their identities and meanings and exaggerate their performances of gender. I planned to observe any natural gendered interactions, and set out to observe whether the children's gendered positionings were exaggerated in mixed groupings compared to single groups. Wood and Cook (op. cit.) asserted that role play should be regarded not as just 'the child's world', but as a site of political engagement and activity. The paradoxical nature of play requires that children position themselves in particular ways and in particular narratives. Rules that are imposed from outside are suspended; in order to substantiate their creative pretence, they create their own rules. When considering the dimensions of diversity, it was important to consider how some children may be excluded or disadvantaged by the power effects of these choices. The power differentials were observed alongside the general gender rules and roles they adhered to, challenged and adopted within their settings.

3.5.6 Puppeteering

Puppets firmly reside within the oral and organic story tradition, which is why I chose to use a dragon to support my storytelling sessions. In the storytelling discussions, I also introduced character puppets designed by the children during the activities. Sirigatti (2014) commented that 'through puppets, children feel empowered to speak and behave on behalf of the character [puppet] they are portraying' (op. cit.). Remer and Tzuriel, (2015) observed that the strength of puppets is in being a type of three-dimensional symbolic art form, with the ability to sing, dance, speak in rhyme, touch, laugh or cry. It is through these human skills that children can identify with the puppets, as they can see themselves or part of themselves in the characters.

Yoeli (2008) explained that because puppets are only partially formed, the child is required to activate them and give them 'a life of their own' by projecting various emotions onto them whilst still controlling them. For the purposes of my research this was important because it helped to generate the children's understanding of their own gendered emotions in association with the protagonists of the stories. Significantly, Cooper-Keisari (2009) explained that puppets help children to express

thoughts and feelings that otherwise would remain hidden for fear of being considered unacceptable by adults or their peers. Remer and Tzuriel, (2015) observed that young children can experience difficulties handling direct questioning about feelings and emotions. To help the children cope with this potential difficulty, we discussed the possible scenarios from the stories and debated how their puppet characters would have responded. Alderson (2001) asserted that the benefit of a play method such as this is that it 'can enhance children's research imaginations' (op. cit.:147). Incorporating this strategy allowed the children to be challenged by unfamiliar, yet realistic gender issues by drawing on their critical thinking and creative skills.

3.6 Adult perspectives

Gaining adult perspectives is important as they create opportunities for meaning-making and facilitating the exchange of meanings with the children across generational and professional boundaries. As with the children, parents and teachers are not static homogenous groups, but contain many layers of cultural gendered knowledge and perceptions. Their contributions through qualitative tools of non-participatory questionnaires and participatory interviews were sought to gain new understandings of gender in real-life changing cultural contexts.

3.6.1 Semi-structured questionnaires

Advantages. The aim of the questionnaires was to gain further information about the social interdependency and context on children's meaning-making about gender. A covering letter and questionnaire were given to all the teachers (Appendices 4 and 5) and the parents (Appendices 7 and 8) of all the children in the classes where the research was being conducted. The small size of the teacher and parental participant sample allowed the qualitative questionnaire to be, less structured and more open-ended to capture the schools' individual contexts. This questionnaire was particularly suitable for investigating complex issues, such as gender, where simple answers fall short. I checked thoroughly that the wording of the items was impartial and balanced, and that the design was simple through my pilot questionnaire. Enhancing the accessibility of the questionnaire to the respondents increased reliability and validity.

The questionnaires were divided into five coded thematic aspects (Table 3.2) to determine: “How can a critical gendered response be elicited in young children using fairy tales?”

Code	Themes
1. Demographic details (Research Q.1)	<i>Careers</i> background – including engineering (STEM), public sector (caring, administration); examination of public roles versus private roles. Compare with code 4.
2. Stories shared (Research Q.1)	<i>Story interests</i> - the impact on gender, culture and power relations being promoted.
3. Natural perceptions (Research Q.1 and 2.)	<i>Cultural influences and values</i> - whether passing on traditional ‘norm’ expectations.
4. Gendered relationships (Research Q.3 and 4.)	<i>Alternative and subversive roles</i> - participants’ flexibility and understanding towards the fluidity of gender roles and expectations, and any ambiguities within their perceptions.
5. Story extensions (Research Q.3 and 4.)	<i>Gender-neutrality and transformation</i> - provision of further knowledge and experience of gender and roles and accompanying storytelling equality practices.

Table 3.2. The thematic coded framework of the questionnaires.

The semi-structured questionnaire allowed the agenda to be set, but did not presuppose the nature of the response.

Limitations. Self-administered questionnaires allow greater anonymity, whilst the lack of face-to-face contact can render the data more or less honest. To avoid falsification of responses, a checking mechanism was introduced into the questionnaire by asking another question on the same topic. Completing an open-ended questionnaire is time consuming for the respondent, which is why I included a couple of introductory multiple-choice questions (Appendices 5 and 8: Q.1-3) and a set of rating scale questions (Appendix 5: Q.15; Appendix 8: Q.12). This helped the questionnaires not to appear so long and discouraging (thereby leading to refusal to complete the item), and was still more sensitive than a simple tick response. Despite this, I did devise a shorter questionnaire (Appendix 8) based on the fuller version, which increased the response rate by half that of the original despatch of questionnaires. This took place three weeks after the original one, as recommended by Bailey (1994:163-9).

3.6.2 Semi-formal interviews

Advantages. Semi-formal interviews were held with the teachers to contrast individual perspectives, beliefs and philosophies. Due to the inclusive, non-hierarchical structure and greater participatory-researcher involvement in the WS kindergarten, one father volunteered to have a recorded informal conversation and this was not met by any resistance from the staff. Topics and issues based upon the research questions and literature were shared in advance in an outline form to increase the comprehensiveness of the data collected from each teacher respondent. With reference to a semi-formal interview prompt format (Appendix 6), I flexibly presented the sequence of questions during the interview. Working the questions this way enabled the interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational, supporting the interpretative nature of the study. As with the questionnaires, I achieved this by asking simpler, less threatening and non-controversial questions earlier in order to put the respondents at their ease, as Patton (1980:210-11) suggested. The open-ended questions were categorised following Patton's criteria into substance questions (descriptive, experience, background and knowledge) and process questions (behaviour, gender construct-forming, alternative, feeling, sensory and demographic). As with the questionnaires, an unstructured response mode was chosen as it allows the respondent autonomy over the ways they could answer. I ensured that any verbal and non-verbal feedback to the respondent was appropriate and remained silent whenever possible to allow the respondent to talk. In doing so, I was able to ensure clarity by identifying the terms and expressions the interviewee used in their responses and re-worded mine accordingly (op. cit.:210). Furthermore, due to the informal approach, I was able to prompt, probe and press for elucidation when necessary from the respondent.

Limitations. A weakness of this semi-structured interview approach is that salient items can be inadvertently omitted. The flexibility in sequencing and working questions can result in substantially different responses, so reducing their comparability. However, ambiguity and contradictions in participants' responses can still be identified, as Kvale (1996:30) noted, especially if the interview provoked new insights and changes in themselves. I recorded the interviews on a compact audio recorder in order to gather as much rich data as possible, although as Cohen *et al.* (2011:424) made clear, this method can sometimes inhibit the respondent.

3.6.3 Cross-educational perspectives

Advantages. I examined educational documents and school policies from both primary and secondary sources. Scott (1990) defined a document as 'an artefact which has as its central feature an inscribed text' (op. cit.:5), stated in social and cultural constructs. Hartas (2010:188) defined primary sources as those that are created within the research setting: unprinted private documents (teacher's individual planning) and semi-official documents (LEA and schools' policies). Secondary sources were categorised as those in the form of books and articles, such as official 'top-down' documents (government reports) and story books. McCulloch (2004:5) maintained that the advantage of documentary studies is that they can provide insights into aspects of change and continuity in educational ideas and practices. Hartas (2010:187) expounded the benefit of documentary research in that it provides additional perspectives and insights on research topics, a point of reference and background data.

Limitations. The limitation of documentary records lies in the representativeness of documents, their bias, and the nature and means of interpreting data. It must be remembered that they are social and cultural constructs and need to be understood in their proper context. Cohen *et al.* (2011:254) stressed the ethical implications of insider research, for instance where the material appears likely to cast an unfavourable light upon the institution. The documentary evidence was aligned with the teacher and parent questionnaires and interview findings, which promoted methodological pluralism to determine the current practices within schools towards gendered equality and parity.

3.7 Researcher's perspectives

To determine my level of involvement as participant researcher, it was important to consider my researcher status, the impact of my participant-observation on the participants' responses and my subjectivity. During the research I recognised that my etic and emic status influenced my level of involvement and engagement with the research participants, the balance between my observations of events, my interactions with participants and the participating activities themselves. Maharaj (2016) discussed how the researcher's perception of themselves in relation to the participants can affect their observational sensitivity by what they notice, document and even leave out of their field notes.

In my observational diary notes I found it useful to record further questions to be asked and make notes about new understandings and ideas that occurred. Interestingly, my description of the research-participants I noted was limited, partly due to my concern about the ethical considerations of the research. I was extremely cautious to respect the participants' anonymity and their identifiability due to my connection with them and the research settings. Here is an extract from my dairy notes that illustrates the point:

The Head Teacher came and observed for a short while; the children remained absorbed with the story puppet and discussion.

Influence of the story – what they wanted to be when older. The boys eagerly drew their ideas and choices mostly from the story or make-believe characters, sitting up and loudly naming popular action heroes.

From my prior tacit knowledge about the state schools' practice, I was able to knowledgeably prepare the storytelling research activities and thereby feel powerful rather than powerless. However, I was less familiar with the WS kindergarten practice, although welcomed as part of the 'teaching' team as demonstrated in the transcript with the younger WS teacher and a boy:

The children are sewing felted finger puppets for their show, they have no faces like the cardboard 2D characters in a fairy tale.

TWS2: Knot on the end. Can you do knots?

B: Can you do knots?

R: I'll have a go.

TWS2: Introduce that puppet to Jane. Who is it?

B: Grandma? (Child is unsure, genderless puppets).

TWS2: Got to go around to the ear, which is where you started. Need to be quite strong – go around the neck twice.

R: See how it forms the shape of the head. Go around once more. Keep going on up here.

B: I need to go quickly.

My observational notes showed that I often used the first pronoun in my field notes in the state schools, indicating a confident integration in the research settings as mentioned (Appendix 3). This was not the case with the WS kindergarten, due to a

lack of any previous experience in this educational environment. Following their philosophy about providing an uninterrupted rhythm for the children, they again requested I stayed all day when conducting my research. Doing so enabled the possibility of developing a greater empathic understanding and confident relationships with the staff, overcoming my initial uncertainties.

3.7.1 Self-revelation and observer-participant continuum

When investigating the gender assumptions children and adults make, my position adjusted according to my place on the observer-participant continuum. I noted that my role was mostly visible and highly participatory when conducting the storytelling discussions, activities and the teachers' interviews. Aware of this, I tried to reduce and withdraw my participation to limit the possibility of researcher bias. It was only with the informal conversations with the WS parents and teachers that the interactions became less researcher-led. In designing and analysing the parent and teacher questionnaires, my role again was significantly highly participatory and highly observational. Similarly, as Fook and Gardner (2007) found, the research milieu drew upon my knowledge, skills and own gendered cultural and emotional background, which sometimes conflicted with those of the research participants (Chapter 7.5.1).

3.7.2 Critical reflexivity to research cultural tools and gender

As a co-participant and co-constructor, it was important to consider myself as an instrument of data collection and analysis. My role as co-participant observer was evident when the WS teacher described my behaviour from her observations:

WS2: She's very quiet, she watches every single thing we do. [Laughter]

WS1: I have noticed, Jane, you do see wider little things. You're very observant.

In response to the awareness that I was being critically observed, my attentional focus intensified. Critical reflexivity is the process of acknowledging or making explicit one's own contribution, such as thoughts and decisions, to the research process. Critical reflexivity encompasses both reflection and critical reflection, and although these terms are used interchangeably, they are not equivalent. Fook and Gardner (2007) defined reflection as the process of thinking about an experience or a particular practice, whilst critical reflection involves a deeper level of reflection and the deconstruction and examination of assumptions, beliefs, insights, attitudes,

interests and curiosities as they play out within the interpretive dimensions of the study and guide one's actions. Critical reflexivity requires the researcher to consider how their personal experiences relate to their assumptions about knowledge, power and privilege. The critical element is not only the questions that researchers use to direct their focus towards the intentional development of different perspectives, but also the consideration of their mindset or outlook when examining the assumptions that are implicit and explicit in their research.

In this study, I engaged in two forms of reflexivity, as denoted by Ryan (2007), introspection and epistemic reflexivity. Introspection reflexivity is based upon experiential encounters, and provides emotional openings that allows the opportunity to empathise with the research participants' situations, belief systems and lives. This strategy helps the researcher to gain an insight into the participants' culture and understandings. Epistemic reflexivity is an examination of one's beliefs and assumptions. This form of reflexivity included the use of Kuehne's (2016:Sec.3:4, Para.43) interpretation of Stephen Brookfield's four lens model of critical reflection in varying degrees: analysis of assumptions, contextual awareness of responses, imaginative speculation and reflective scepticism. The key factor was that although any one of these lenses could prove beneficial as an independent tool for critical reflection, Brookfield's intention was that they were combined as a whole to give multiple perspectives.

3.7.3 Reducing bias

Reflexivity-as-praxis is much less often discussed in research, but examining the positionality of the researcher is a critical part of any reflexive process, especially concerning research interactions. Positionality involves being transparent about one's identities, such as 'I am a white middle-aged teacher and lecturer, with a Christian background and lone mother of four'. Hence, I was aware that any research practices I adopted would be influenced by the intersectionality of my cultural identity facets. Seddon (2013) commented on the effect of research practice due to the powerful 'sway of past paradigms', and showed how the influence of these 'monster' narratives can dictate adult-child roles. I was therefore conscious of the slippages between discourses, such as the practice of being 'the teacher' following a well-entrenched script dictated by past meta-narratives around an adult's role to simply impart knowledge to children. To address these issues, I treated all knowledge as contestable and equally balanced, to the best of my ability, and

respected the perplexity expressed in the children's questions against my own wisdom to date, as suggested by Haynes (cited in Robson and Quinn, 2015:473).

3.7.4 Contradictory role

During the research, I found myself in a contradictory position in relation to the children, especially in regard to three aspects: my teacher-researcher role, challenging sexist behaviour and researcher-led study. In the adult-researcher role, I was expected to adopt a 'teacher' role to monitor the children's behaviour and to intervene in situations where children transgressed acceptable lines of behaviour. On the other hand, my participant-researcher role involved collaboration and building trusting relationships, as someone the children could confide in within specific contexts. This had an impact on the provision of space and freedom to introduce and talk about taboo matters with the children, such as physically gendered appearances.

Another contradictory involvement in the children's discussions took place when they made sexist and misogynistic statements, and it was often difficult to know when to intervene. To ensure that the children were not left assuming that their views were condoned, I would purposely ask the child to explain what they had said and would encourage them to reflect upon their perceptions. I invited them to think about questions such as: 'Do you think that is a nice thing to say?' or 'How would you feel if someone called you a name like that?' The use of such questions was designed to encourage the children to reflect upon the consequences of their attitudes, and thus begin to challenge them for themselves (Pullman 2017). Furthermore, children are often engaged in general struggles to subvert the authority that adults have over them within the school, as Christensen (2004) found. The blurring of adult/child boundaries in relation to my own gendered researcher position created an opportunity for resistance, which some of the children attempted to capitalise upon (Chapter 5.5). The way the children drew upon sexist discourses of gender did suggest that they were partly directed towards me as an adult, white female, a strategy the boys in particular were found to employ.

The final contradictory position occurred when supporting the Vygotskian dialogical pedagogical model where I tried to deliberately design a child-led study as opposed to a pre-structured researcher-led study. I noted that it oscillated between a purely 'child-led' process and one where I interjected to scaffold more in-depth thought, as

Bruner (1983) recommended. This influenced the data and raised the question about its true and genuine representation of the children’s gendered worlds and their ‘authentic’ voices. To address this matter of contamination of data, I ensured that the data was fully contextualised, as advised by Connolly (Christensen and James, 2017:115).

3.8 Interpretative analysis and frameworks

The data generated from this research study was almost inevitably interpretive and hence its analysis was less than a completely accurate presentation (as in positivist), but more of a reflexive interaction between the participant-researcher and the de-contextualised data. The study incorporated Brenner *et al.*’s (1985:144) steps of content analysis with open-ended data. It initially involved immersion, whereby frequencies of occurrence were identified with words, ideas and themes noting any patterns, causes and explanations (Table 3.3 taken from Appendix 9):

Words	Fairy Tale	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Baby	Hansel and Gretel	<p><i>(Ability to cry is perceived as a weakness.)</i></p> <p>R: What would you have done if you returned home and found your mummy wasn’t there and she had disappeared?</p> <p>G1: I would cry.</p> <p>G2: I wouldn’t because my dad and Adam would look after me.</p> <p>G3: I would be really sad and I would cry as much as a <i>baby</i>.</p>	<p><i>(Physical overthrow of matriarchy by reducing to state of helplessness.)</i></p> <p>BB: I would make the witch go into the factory and turn into <i>baby</i> bits.</p>	<p><i>(Penalty for girls’ weaknesses.)</i></p> <p>R: Why do you think the witch chose the girl though?</p> <p>B: She was being too babyish.</p>

Table 3.3 Children’s use of diminishing words (taken from Appendix 9).

The gendered items were then clustered and organised into categories of social cultures, behaviours, cognitive processes and response classifications (Table 3.4). From these interpretations, units of individual meanings and understandings were

constructed (Appendix 10) and these helped to eliminate redundancies. As shown in Chapters 5-7, rich descriptive analysis was then used to clarify the key concepts that arose, and to connect the data with the theory.

Types of gendered cultures	Behaviours	Higher Cognitive Processes for Critical Response	Classification of responses
Toxic masculinity	Heroism	<i>(Private/internal)</i>	Traditional Sexist Misogynist Oppressive Subversive Conflicting Receptive Resistant Alternative Progressive Transformative Emancipatory
Pink princess culture	Competitiveness	Memories	
	Aggressiveness	Experiences	
Super masculinity	Niceness	Feelings	
	Humour	<i>(Public/external)</i>	
	Sexism	Questions	
Super femininity	Adventurousness	Interpretations	
	Empathy	Reviews	
Gender-neutral	Assertiveness	Explanations	
	Agency	Expressions of emotion	
	Narcissism		

Table 3.4 Categorisation of participants' gendered responses.

The synthesis processes provided clear identification of the themes and patterns gained from the clusters of meaning, such as the formation of a mosaic, and the effective triangulation of data. The mosaic aspect supported the assembly of research material using several individual tiles, that when combined together formed an educational framework. The associated themes were presented in the form of tiles, and these were colour coded according to the associated sub-research question they answered. The process of the inductive analysis ensured that there was clear evidence of the incidence of occurrence, proven indication of directions and intentionality of feelings, and an awareness of what was not said as well as what was said.

Hermeneutic analysis. The qualitative analysis of the documentary data was systematic and critical. Scott (1990) advised considering the authenticity of the data, whether the evidence was 'genuine and of unquestionable origin' (op. cit.:7) and whether proper judgement was made of the quality of the data. I considered

reliability in terms of understanding and detecting any bias, appraisal of the truthfulness of accounts, as well as practical considerations of the availability of the source material, its representativeness and how it contributed to gender-neutral classroom practices. Using a wide range of sources acted as a further form of triangulation and ensured any alternative, contradictory or conflicting perspectives were revealed.

3.9 Chapter conclusion

To answer the central question “How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?”, this study argued that the use of multimodal communication strategies enabled the adult-children and children-children gendered interactions and perceptions to become visible. The different tools acted as a catalyst for clear open dialogue between the participants and myself, and helped to develop collaborative and trusting relationships. As Woodhead and Faulkner (cited in Christensen and James, 2017:15) clarified, in addition to the developmental paradigm, the interpretative one was equally valid, building upon the assumption that children are competent and were to play an active role that utilised their own strengths, interests and perceptions. Instead of viewing cultural concepts as inherent properties of the individual, the meaning-making was held as being created in social contexts with adults and children co-constructing as equal experts with their own voices. The participatory methods enabled the children to play an equal part in constructing multi-layered understandings, which generated opportunities to bring different languages and modes together to produce a multimodal mosaic (Chapter 5.6). As Clark (2011) showed, informant generated texts and documents can provide the opportunity for visible and tangible critical listening supported by the materiality of the media artefacts produced, enabling change and opportunity to cross cultural, generational and institutional boundaries. Furthermore, encouraging critical self-reflection in children enables taken for granted assumptions about gender, power and culture to be exposed. The multimodal documentation formed a pedagogical lens into understanding the meaning-making as knowledge production potentially leading to change and transformation, rather than the generalisability of any conclusions. However, by being mindful of the interpretative nature of the study and acknowledging there is only so much that can be known about others, the multi-faceted reflexive representations of what was important and meaningful to children and adults were sought.

The socio-semiotic framework supported the interpretative analysis of the individual modes of communication which the research participants drew upon and their perceptions and critical responses. In addition, using multimodality in the study allowed the examination of the interweaving of the different modes to produce an analysis which was more than the individual modal parts. The participatory researcher's ethical commitment to critical reflexivity, being respectful of difference and not seeking to grasp the 'other', allowed room for dialogue, confrontation, deliberation, and critical thinking. It created the possibility of revealing subjugated forms of knowledge, as Foucault (1980) discussed, and access to self-regulated silenced voices.

Research with young children is often a dynamic, context-specific and contested enterprise. Bringing together the premises of gender, culture and childhood facilitated the acknowledgement of, and reflection upon, the power relations and struggles that are inherent in any research process between the researcher and the children. Christensen (2004) argued: 'In the process of research, power moves between different actors and different social positions, it is produced and negotiated in the social interactions of child to adult, child to child and adult to adult in the local settings of the research' (op. cit.:175). Thus, children's active role in resisting and challenging the relationships created between themselves and the (adult) researcher was recognised. I learned how the children's testing of the researcher's engagement is based upon the wider cultural discourses of gender and society. These discourses are reflected in the fairy tales shared, and will now be considered together in the next chapter as they provided the literary context for the participants' critical responses.

4 Justification for choice of stories

4.1 Alternative protagonists

To investigate “How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?”, I chose those that had principally alternative female protagonists due to my pilot study findings where traditional male protagonists were favoured (Appendix 1). Storytelling is in a perpetual state ‘of becoming’ and of alteration, which mirrors the evolving nature of gender that is constantly in flux, as Butler (1986:37) commented. Fairy tales are a traditional model of storytelling with young children, and are an inspirational multimodal tool of communication containing literary symbolic phrases accompanied by a storyteller’s gestures and character voices, as denoted by Charles and Boyle (2014). Levy (2020) wrote on *World Book Day* about her positive experiences going into schools and leaving the children enthused about stories, in stark contrast to her negative experiences that revealed discriminatory practice. She wrote that:

‘My worst visits have been when I was only allowed to talk to girls, while the boys were shepherded away. “You don’t write books for boys,” I was told, by teachers citing my female protagonists. It was a quick and powerful lesson for all students that women’s stories, and lives, are deemed irrelevant to men’ (op. cit.:34-35).

The fairy tales I chose to use in the study have been retold or written by those with Northern European heritage. These tales and their authors therefore corresponded with the selected pupil cohorts as they were predominantly of the same cultural inheritance. This ensured the young children would already have some familiarity and personal association to support their receptivity to the story messages, their understanding of symbolism and production of language. Furthermore, to assist in the critical deconstruction and reconstruction of the stories’ stereotypes and gendered meanings, I selected three traditional and three contemporary fairy tales. I began the series of literary sessions with a contemporary story that the children would be most familiar with, which contained simple subversive gendered messages. *Zog*, *The Paper Bag Princess* and *Hansel and Gretel* were shared using their respective picture books. *Molly Whuppie*, *The Willow Pattern* story and *Donkeyskin* were shared orally. As the sessions progressed, I gradually introduced more complex and layered cultural symbolism, extending Maguire’s (1985) study (Chapter 2.2.3).

4.2 Zog (Contemporary picture book)

4.2.1 A fairy tale about collaboration and personal liberation

The first picture book chosen was *Zog* by Julia Donaldson (2016), a Scottish writer, and illustrated by German-born Axel Scheffler. It is a story with stock fairy tale characters, a dragon, a knight and a damsel in distress, but their traditional future paths are subverted by the author. The young dragon, Zog, is keen to earn the golden star award and works his way through Dragon School alongside his brightly coloured peers, learning the skills to become fearless and brave. However, he is terribly accident-prone and a young girl arrives to nurse his various bumps and bruises, as on each occasion he ends up in some state of catastrophe (Fig. 4.1). Donaldson later reveals that the young girl is Princess Pearl, and her life-long ambition has always been to become a doctor rather than to pursue the traditional glamorous lifestyle of a princess. Following suit, the knight, Sir Gadabout the Brave (who came to rescue Princess Pearl from the dragon), reveals that he has the same yearning and would happily lay down his sword to pursue a medical career. Even Zog has a change of heart and is keen to join the future medical team as an ambulance driver.



Fig. 4.1 The caring role.

4.2.2 Messages: Limiting traditional roles versus aspirational goals

I selected this story because it contained a post-structuralist focus on individualism and the deconstruction of systems of power that work to ensure conformity and docility in individuals. The protagonist, Zog, is clearly destined to tread the well-worn patriarchal path of bravery, to fight and defeat various knights and so win the princess as his trophy. However, this is not to be, as the bold princess subverts these traditional ideals by declining the passive role of princess for the aspiration of

becoming a doctor. The knight compounds this subversion with his admission that he also wishes to be a doctor rather than the stereotypical chivalrous hero who rescues princesses from their perils. Ironically, Donaldson supports the societal expectation with a female dragon in the primary teacher role, capturing the reality and the patriarchal rhetoric that the responsibility of care and nurturing of young children is still the female domain. Thus, it could be presumed that women themselves are actively cultivating this traditional role casting. As evident in this story, Donaldson clearly imposed her own imaginative subversion and yet contradictorily complied with traditional gender roles.

Using the story, four main areas about gendered stereotypes and cultural messages were examined in the group conference discussions:

Gender identity and emotional themes	Questions	Story activity
I. Stereotypical roles and docility	1. How are fairy tale characters rewarded for bravery and carrying out domestic tasks?	Drawing of future selves.
II. Post-gender roles	2. If you were a dragon in the class would you prefer a male or female teacher?	
III. Gender identification	3. What character would you choose to be from the story?	
IV. Gender attributes and skills	4. What would you like your gold star awarded for at school?	

Table 4.1 Questions and activities for *Zog*.

4.3 The Paper Bag Princess (Contemporary picture book)

4.3.1 A fairy tale about true beauty and assertiveness

The picture book, *The Paper Bag Princess*, is a traditional fairy tale turned on its head. It was first published in 1980 by Robert Munsch, of German descent, and the book is illustrated by Michael Martchenko, of French descent. It was written during the end of the second wave of feminism in Western Europe when issues concerning

oppression and discrimination were being raised about the intersection of the cultural roles of women in the family and in society.

The story is about Princess Elizabeth and Prince Ronald, whose feelings for one another are at odds from the outset. The author presents a girl who is more *in love with love* due to the cultural preoccupation with romance, rather than focusing more deeply on the individual qualities of the other person and the specialness of their relationship. The prince on whom she places all her loving attentions totally rebuffs her amorous affection and, stereotypically, is shown to be more interested in a male pursuit, sport. On the morning of their wedding day a fearsome dragon comes and snatches the prince away (Fig. 4.2). Bereft of her princely idol, Princess Elizabeth immediately follows in hot pursuit to rescue him from his perilous fate. She accomplishes this by cleverly outwitting the dragon, although her beautiful dress is replaced with a sooty paper bag to protect her modesty. The prince harshly rebukes and chastises her on the grounds that her appearance is not worthy of a princess.

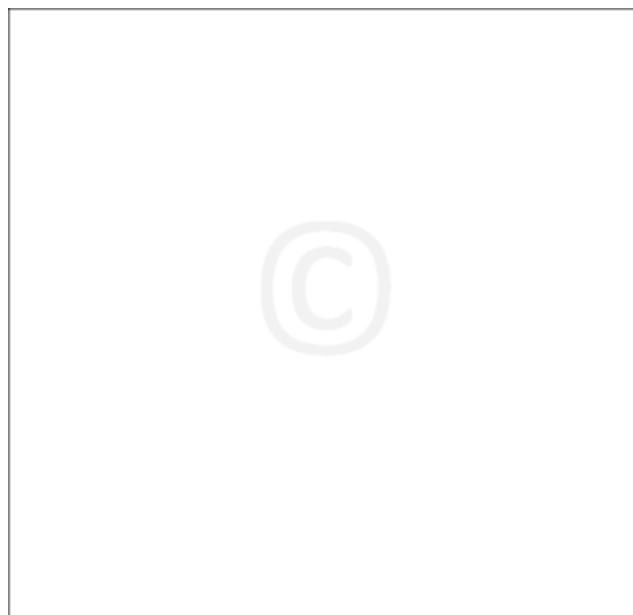


Fig. 4.2 The kidnap.

4.3.2 Messages: Oppression and discrimination

I chose this humorous fairy tale because the female protagonist is un-stereotypically shown to be brave, self-sacrificing and a risk-taker. Princess Elizabeth goes through a period of personal growth and learns the value of self-belief and self-worth, as well as what is true, as opposed to learning about idealised romantic love. The dragon is fearful and imperious, and represents the challenging 'glass ceiling' that

she has to surmount. Many women face unacknowledged barriers and resistance when trying to reach and expand the diversity of the upper positions of their respective endeavours. In his illustrations, Martchenko (1980) emphasised the formidable size of the dragon in comparison to the princess's small stature, and young children can relate to the relationship between size and power in the real world. The story reflects the cultural judgment of female worth associated with physical appearance and indicates the shallowness behind patriarchal sanctions that are applied to women. Martchenko's (op. cit.) illustrations show that untraditional paths, such as singledom, can be seen in a positive light. Critically examining cultural expectations that marriage and family life are the inevitable pre-determined destiny for all, encourages children to consider how one's own autonomy and agency are equally valuable, if not more so.

Using these areas, I asked the children to consider the following questions:

Gender identity and emotional aspects	Questions	Story activities
I. The value of personal self-worth	1. What difference does it make if you are beautiful or ugly?	Role play – with paper bag costume How do you feel wearing it? In pairs, shout and whisper to one another taking turns
II. Social expectations	2. Where do you think the author drew his idea for the princess to wear a paper bag from?	pretending to be the prince and princess about why you do not like them wearing the paper bag, and then their good qualities. How does it make you feel when someone shouts /is understanding towards you?
III. Peer identity and otherness	3. Does your appearance make a difference in making friends?	Paper bag story character puppet 1. Which character would you like to be in a fairy tale?
IV. Empathy and sincerity	4. How do you think the prince's comments at the end made the princess feel?	2. Would your costume for your puppet be made by a tailor or hand-made, old or new, magical or every day?

V. Individualism and individual growth	5. Can you tell me about the princess changing her mind about marrying the prince?	
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Table 4.2 Questions and activities for the *Paper Bag Princess*.

4.4 The Willow Pattern Story (Traditional oral retelling)

4.4.1 A fairy tale about subversiveness and self-sacrifice

This tragic romantic story is based upon the famous illustration of the *Willow Pattern* inspired by images found on Chinese ceramics (Fig. 4.3), which Wallis (2014) explained was used as a clever marketing ploy. It shows the scene of a Chinese pagoda with a bridge, a boat and a willow tree, engraved by Thomas Minton in the 1790's for Thomas Turner of Caughley in Shropshire, England. From the early production of the plate, the story of two childhood sweethearts has been passed down orally from generation to generation, with the dinner plate illustration as an aide-mémoire.

The story is about a rich mandarin who betrothed his daughter, Koong-se, to an ugly, old and wicked warrior-duke, Ta-jin, for a considerable fortune. Koong-se is distraught at this arrangement for she wishes to marry her childhood sweetheart, the mandarin's clerk, Chang. The mandarin, incandescent with rage, would hear none of it and immediately dismisses Chang from his service. On the eve of Koong-se's wedding day to Ta-jin, Chang and Koong-se secretly elope on a boat taking the warrior's endowment gift to the mandarin, a casket of precious jewels, with them. Years pass, and Chang becomes renowned for his successful rice farming and for his published works on the irrigation of rice fields using ducks; unfortunately, this proves to be the loving couple's undoing. Eventually Chang's writings fall into the hands of the warrior who still harbours thoughts of revenge and retribution for the kidnap of his bride and the theft of his precious jewels, so he sends his guards with the order to slay Chang. Koong-se, distraught at her lover's slaughter, sets fire to the farm and perishes whilst cradling his dying body in the flames. The gods watching this tragic plight are so touched by the purity of their love that they freed their tortured souls and immortalised them as two white doves, who can be forever seen flying together high in the sky above the willow trees.

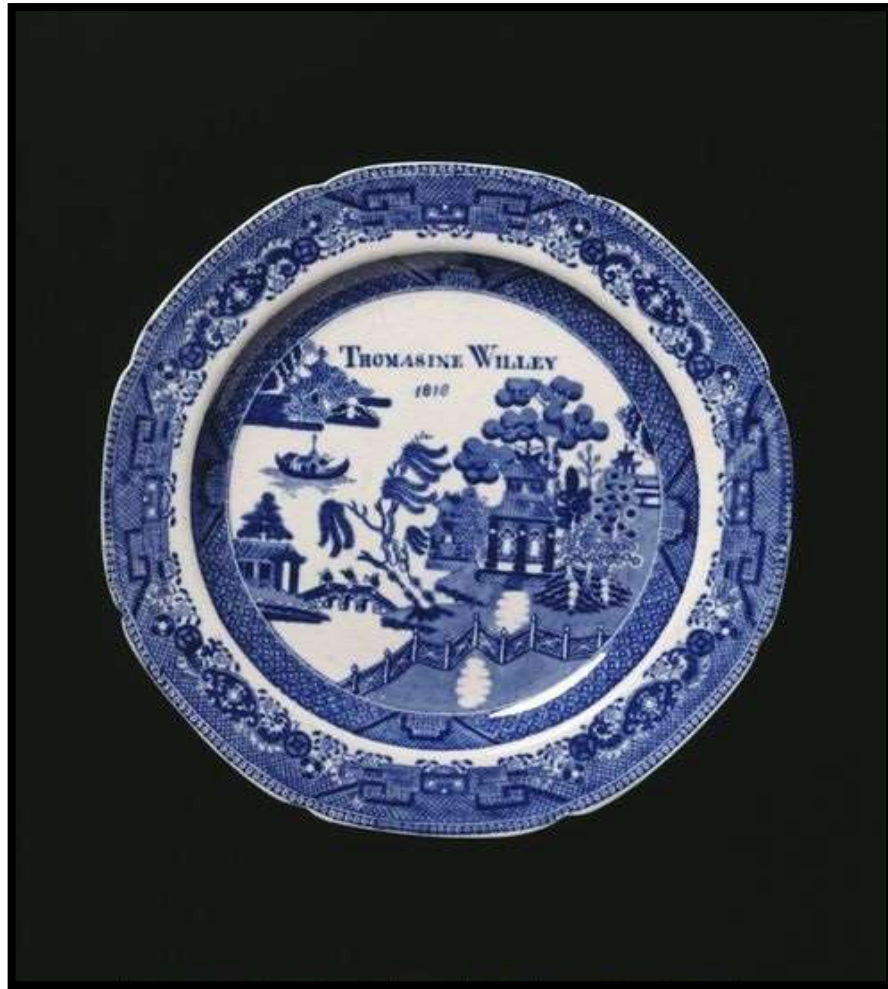


Fig. 4.3 A *Willow Pattern* plate design (V&A).

4.4.2 Messages: Subjugation and docility

I picked this story because it raises issues about patriarchal structures and the justice and cultural punishments that are dealt out for lack of conformity and docility, particularly to women. To acquire agency, choice and status, the story promotes the need for equality if it is to be achieved harmoniously, and it warns of the self-sacrifice that is often involved if there is disharmony. Using the plate with the simple illustrations enabled the children to critique the meanings behind the symbols and pictures. In both ancient Eastern and Western religious and cultural stories to the present day, white birds are used to symbolise the presence of divine spirituality and purity, which can arise from voluntary self-sacrifice. Less familiar images were considered too, such as the image of Ta-jinn chasing with a whip in his hand; I encouraged the children to philosophise about the significance of the whip.

Using this story, the following themes were raised for critical debate:

Gender identity and emotional aspects	Questions	Story activities
I. Asymmetric power relations and subjugation	1. Who is the rule maker in the story?	Role play – listening How do we 'listen' to one another?
II. Assertiveness, agency and interdependency	2. Can you tell me about the father ignoring his daughter's wishes and thoughts?	Pretend to be a daughter/son asking to go on the river, with the father arguing against doing so. Give clear explanations for your reasons. Can you both agree at the end?
III. Equality and social status	3. Can you tell me about whether it is better to marry for money or for love?	Magic boat model Choose a special companion who can help you if you get into trouble.
IV. Freedom and self-sacrifice	4. What would you have done if you were the daughter and wanted to do something differently?	

Table 4.3 Questions and activities for the *Willow Pattern*.

4.5 Molly Whuppie (Traditional oral retelling)

4.5.1 A fairy tale about courageousness and risk taking

Molly Whuppie is a traditional Scottish fairy tale taken from the *English Fairy Stories* (1890) compilation by Joseph Jacobs, an English-Australian folklorist. The story begins with Molly and her two elder sisters being led into the forest and abandoned by their starving mother. There they come across an old thatched cottage where an Ogre's wife and three daughters welcome the girls in. However, the Ogre plots to kill them but due to Molly's guile, he slaughters his own daughters whilst Molly and her sisters escape and run for safety to a nearby castle. Upon hearing their story, the king of the castle challenges little plain Molly to retrieve three of the Ogre's precious magical belongings in return for his three sons' hands in marriage.

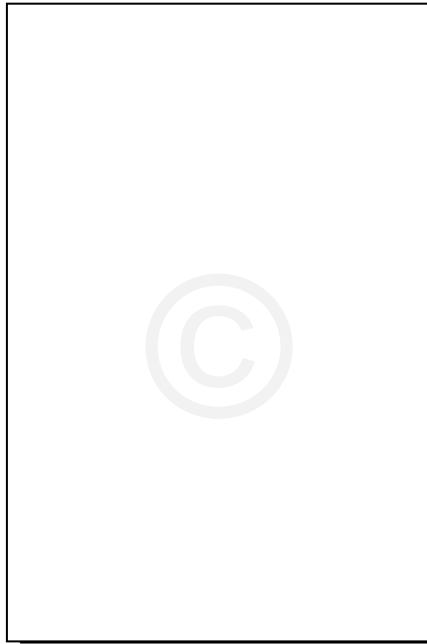


Fig. 4.4 The Ogre's sword.

Molly successfully steals the first two treasures, the Ogre's sword and purse (Fig. 4.4), but on the final quest for his magical ring the Ogre awakes and grips her tightly. Molly manages to escape by tricking the Ogre into ruthlessly battering his wife to death in a sack. Upon realising his mistake, the Ogre immediately races in hot pursuit of Molly to the castle. Just as the Ogre is almost upon her, he plummets to his untimely death trying to cross the castle's bridge of a 'hair's breadth' (Fig 4.5). The story ends with the three sisters happily marrying the three handsome brothers, with the king's joyous blessing.

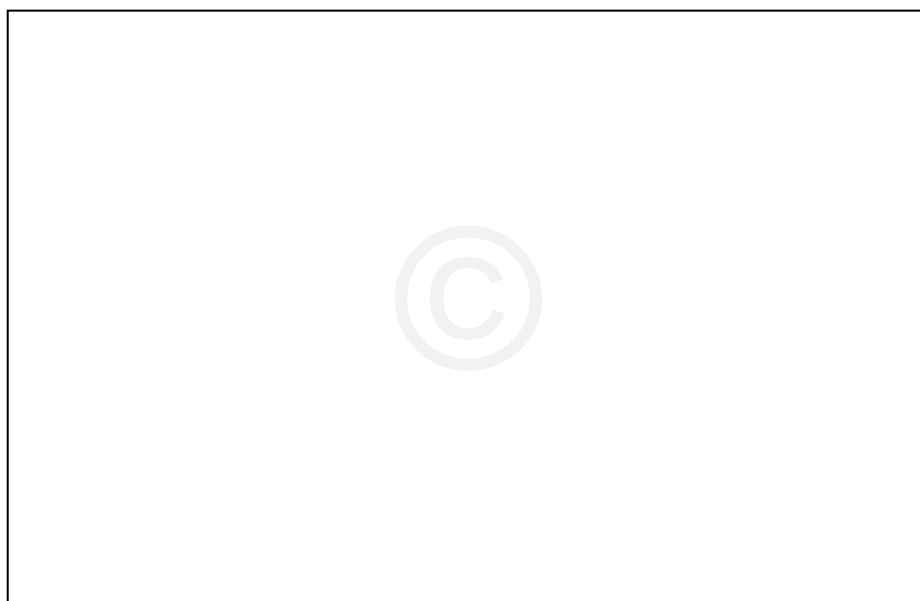


Fig. 4.5 The bridge of a hair's breadth.

4.5.2 Messages: Despotism and violence

I chose this story about the determined protagonist, Molly, who cleverly subverted patriarchal domination by adopting the un-stereotypical role of heroic rescuer. Stories are a way of dealing with episodes of adversity that children experience combined with the hopeful promise of deliverance. The antagonist, the cannibalistic Ogre, represents the patriarchal dispenser of justice, cruelty and violence, and thus the story confronts the inadmissible reality of despotism. The story reflects how men and women are often bound by different rules and cultural expectations, a far cry from gendered equality. It raises the uncomfortable issue of female complicity to violence, where Molly plays an instrumental and uncompassionate part in the fate of the Ogre's wife and children. Moreover, the Ogre's wife poses the question of female invisibility, described by Freidan (1963:5) as the *person with no name*, lacking any voice of authority compared to that of the patriarchal *wealth* provider. Disappointingly, despite Molly's extreme valour and initial subversion from pre-determined gendered roles, her quest as an independent agent is limited by marriage. The story is a reminder that agency is far from given and encourages children to question the gender restrictions in patriarchal societies and how these can be overcome.

The story identified four main stereotypical gendered issues:

Gender identity and emotional aspects	Questions	Story activity
I. Non-gender specific qualities and virtues	1. What makes a good person?	Drawing of magical symbol 1. Which magical symbol would you choose? 2. What magic powers would it contain? 3. How would it help you on your journey towards your dream goal?
II. Gender subversion	2. Which other fairy tale characters play similar tricks to Molly?	
III. Cruelty and violence by both men <i>and</i> women	3. Can you tell me how you feel about the violence in the story?	
IV. The dispensation of justice in the home and society	4. Do only bad people get punished?	

Table 4.4 Questions and activities for *Molly Whuppie*.

4.6 Donkeyskin (Traditional oral retelling)

4.6.1 A fairy tale about virtuousness, agency and family rehabilitation

The *Donkeyskin* story was first recorded in an Italian Roman Catholic sermon in 1501, followed in 1550 by Straparola's tale, *Doralice*. Charles Perrault, a French writer, recorded his poem *Peau-d'Asne* – Donkeyskin (1695) about unnatural family love in a small fairy tale volume. In January 1697, the Parisian publisher, Claude Barbin, reissued this story along with several other prose tales under the title *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des Moralitez*: in English they were rendered as the *Mother Goose Tales*.



Fig. 4.6 The King's income earner.

The story begins with the protagonist's mother tragically lying on her deathbed, with a dying instruction to her husband to remarry a woman more beautiful than herself. The king chooses to overcome his loss by marrying the princess, his lovely stepdaughter. This frightens the princess, but her godmother strictly instructs her not to disobey her stepfather, advising her to set almost impossible tasks before him

by requesting a series of celestial dresses. It is only by promising the ultimate sacrifice, to give him anything he wishes in return for the skin of his precious gold-making donkey, that she manages to trick him and escape (Fig. 4.6). The donkey is symbolic as usually it is a source of ridicule, rather than an animal possessed with magical qualities. As soon as the princess dons the donkey skin to sneak away from the castle in disguise, the ridiculing begins, with the story reducing her to the position of a lowly farmhand. As luck would have it, one day a prince spies her through her keyhole cloaked in sunbeams from her gold celestial dress; he falls instantly in love. Lovesick, he orders her to bake him a cake; whilst doing so she drops her emerald ring into the batter. As with Cinderella's glass slipper, the prince declares he will only wed the person whom the ring fits. This proves to be like fitting large ropes through the eye of a needle, with young women slicing their fingers to the bone in their desperate desire for matrimony. Shielded by ugliness, *Donkeyskin* is eventually permitted to step forth, whereupon the ring slips perfectly upon her delicate ivory finger. The story ends with the princess forgiving her stepfather and inviting him to her wedding with his beautiful new wife.

4.6.2 Messages: Adult abuse, vulnerability and narcissism

I selected Perrault's retelling because it addresses a complicated family issue in a form that is accessible for children to be able to philosophise upon. The story is well known in France and in other parts of Europe, whereas it is hardly heard in England. The reason is partly due to the cultural reticence at openly confronting darker family power issues that can lead to incest and child abuse. In Perrault's version of *Donkeyskin*, the blame is directed explicitly towards the mother for the husband's sexual transgressions as her dying request feeds his desire for a beautiful woman. Displaced blame is often ingrained in fairy tales, where (step-) mothers who have most often experienced cyclical abuse themselves stand accused, whilst fathers are spared condemnation. The story highlights how children are taught from infancy that beauty is held to be *a woman's sceptre* (Wollstonecraft, 1792:33) rather than valuing their wit. The story exposes the brutal physical mutilation that coming-of-age girls, and increasingly boys, are prepared to carry out on themselves in desperation for society's acceptance and fiscal rewards. The story valuably questions the self-destructive compliance that can arise from the hierarchical nature of patriarchy and the associated narcissistic obsession with beauty.

Using this story, the following issues were identified for exploration in the group storytelling discussions:

Gender identity and emotional themes	Questions	Story Activities
I. Ideal parent (versus misplaced love and affection)	1. Who was the fairy godmother in the princess's imagination?	Role play with donkey skin 1. How do you feel when someone shuns you? 2. How do you feel when someone admires you?
II. The beauty ideal	2. Can you tell me about the princess dressing herself in the donkey skin?	
III. Gendered outlooks (male outwards, risk taker; female inwards, nurturer)	3. Who does the Prince remind you of creeping up to the cottage? What happens to girls who do that?	Drawing of designer cake 1. Who would you bake your cake for? 2. What magic ingredients would you choose to make it with? 3. What would happen if you ate a slice?
IV. Docility and gender outlooks	4. Can you tell me about the princess having to bake a cake for the prince?	
V. Relational rehabilitation and sympathy for male characters	5. Who was invited to the wedding?	

Table 4.5 Questions and activities for *Donkeyskin*.

4.7 Hansel and Gretel (Contemporary picture book)

4.7.1 A fairy tale about equality in families, autonomy and acumen

Anthony Browne's (2008) *Hansel and Gretel* is based upon the traditional transformation story collated by two brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The story was originally retold by Henriette Dorothea Wild, Wilhelm's future wife; women were traditionally the collectors, keepers and tellers at that time. It was first recorded in their publication *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's Household Stories)* (1812). The Grimm brothers often changed details to promote middle-class heterogeneous family values appropriate for respectable German citizenship: for instance, wicked mothers were changed to wicked stepmothers (Tatar, 1992:224).

Similarly, some father characters were transformed into stepfathers to present a more wholesome and ideal image, as seen in Perrault's *Donkeyskin*.

This fairy tale is a masterpiece of misrepresentation and trickery. A poverty-stricken stepmother convinces her husband to abandon their children, Hansel and Gretel, in the forest (symbolic of the supernatural world) as they could not feed them anymore. The husband, a woodcutter, even went as far as to trick the children by tying a rope around a twig to a tree so that when the wind blew it would sound as if he was chopping wood nearby. By eavesdropping, Hansel is initially able to out-smart both his parents by following a trail of white pebbles home. On the second occasion his trick of leaving a trail of breadcrumbs (a symbol of the poor) is thwarted by the greedy birds of the forest. Alone in the forest the children stumble across the cannibalistic old witch's 'sweet' cottage and they start to eat pieces of the house. Despite their wanton destruction of the hag's home, the children try to trick her by blaming the wind when she asks who is nibbling at her house. Gently she offers them warm hospitality, saying reassuringly, 'No harm shall come to you'; although her response is cleverly mixed with an element of hostility which creates the sense of ambiguity and foreboding for listeners. Leading them both by the hand, a seemingly harmless action of a venerable grandmother, they are placated but tricked again. Far from being a house of safekeeping, the old crone encages Hansel to later devour him and Gretel is ordered to carry out menial household chores. Despite their hardships, Gretel manages to outwit the witch by pushing her into the scalding oven: once again, an older woman is trapped and burnt alive (symbolising purification). On the return home, Gretel enlists the services of a white duck to help them cross the fast-flowing river: the crossing represents the way the children are moving on to a higher plane of existence and consciousness. This is illustrated by Gretel's show of compassion which she has not revealed before, when she suggests crossing separately to prevent overburdening the duck. Finally, the story ends as the children, laden with handfuls of the stolen witch's pearls and jewels, run into the humble embrace of a remorseful father. Their stepmother is inexplicably dead and all the past events between them are forgiven.

4.7.2 Messages: Family tensions, harmful behaviours and cultural complicity

I chose the subversive story because it visits a number of family emotional and relationship issues that children experience: blended families, the questionable notions of mother as the provider and of father as the main-carer, domesticity,

cleverness, activeness and passiveness, forgiveness, and wealth at someone else's expense.

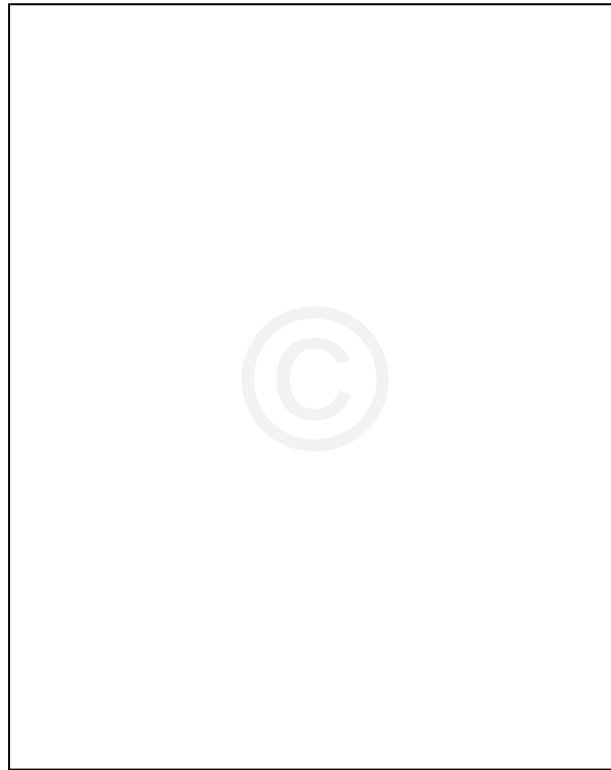


Fig. 4.7 The children's stepmother.

Browne (2008) cleverly places ambiguity in his pictures about the identity of the children's stepmother that is juxtaposed with that of the old witch (Fig. 4.7); both express verbal abuse towards the children, reflecting dysfunctional family relationships. I was interested in the transformation of Hansel and Gretel along their liberating story character arcs. Initially their gender roles are stereotypical with Hansel as the leadership figure, and Gretel as the silent follower. As the story progresses Hansel gradually comes to accept Gretel as an equal with her own valuable ideas and skills to contribute. In so doing, the story challenges the macho-male role that boys are often pressurised into adopting. Meanwhile, Gretel learns to overcome her fears and develops confidence in her own abilities, becoming a quick-thinking 'go-girl'. In Browne's (op. cit.) final illustration, the father, initially portrayed as uncaring and distant, is transformed into a loving and devoted lone-parent. A BBC report (2017) discussed the significant changes in government legislation concerning the role of fatherhood; from 2003, when only two weeks of paid paternity leave was initially awarded, to both parents equally being granted shared parental leave in April 2015. Despite these progressive legislations towards egalitarian parental caring responsibilities, a study showed how only 1% of fathers had taken

up the recent opportunity of extended paternity leave. Hence, the traditional rather than alternative patterns of childcare and family workforce earning opportunities continue to be modelled to children and indicate why fathers may not prioritise time for sharing fairy tales.

In this story, due to the emotional turmoil and blur of family relationships and roles that were evident, the following aspects were raised:

Gender identity and emotional themes	Questions	Story Activity
I. Alternative gendered family roles	1. Can you tell me about the wicked stepmother and the innocent father?	Shape drawing game In pairs, take turns to draw a triangle and then the other draw a face from the story around it. Tell one another about your character and how they are feeling.
II. Expectations of gender roles	2. What would you have done if you were the father?	
III. Family responsibilities	3. Can you tell me about Hansel locked up in the cage?	
IV. Emancipation	4. What was special about overcoming the witch?	
V. Consequences of poverty and wealth on family life	5. Can you give me a reason for the stepmother dying?	
VI. Gender identification – agentic or passive roles	6. Which character would you have liked to have been in the story?	

Table 4.6 Questions and activities for *Hansel and Gretel*.

4.8 Chapter conclusion

All the stories were shared in the state schools; none expressed concern about the fairy tales chosen. The reception teacher from state school A discussed how she aimed to share a wide variety of stories over the whole year due to government guidelines that state reception children need a repertoire of twelve stories. As a result of my questioning, she considered how she did ‘need to challenge a bit more – the ones like *Paper Bag Princess*, I haven’t used that for a long time – and just think yes I know that story and I now need to use it’. Her uncritical relaxed stance towards gender-neutrality may have been influenced by her perception that men and women were equal, and that she believed this view was reflected in society as

well. In contrast, in the WS kindergarten, I found that the teachers consciously censored the stories and only shared those that strictly adhered to Steiner's spiritual science philosophy, anthroposophy, similarly replicating Christensen's (2003:238) findings. The *Willow Pattern* story was agreed upon due to its associations with the natural world, particularly the seasonal references. It was strongly believed that stories should come from the heart, and were mainly selected to address children's immediate social or emotional needs. The teacher requested an email copy of the story beforehand, and after having slept upon it, she wished for some of the story elements to 'be tweaked'. Through his aphoristic teachings, Steiner (1995:33) advised that WS teachers were to handle fairy tales with care and to introduce only the finest archetypal truths. Thus, to ensure that the story was filled with a 'quality of soul', she expressed concern about the 'stealing' of the box of jewels and the revenge 'killing', and suggested a 'softer' ending. Instead, she proposed that the children were presented with a story of a young couple who accomplished something unusual and remarkable. Following the WS tradition of harmony with nature, she recommended the retelling about Chang and Koong-se discovering the practice of using ducks to enhance the irrigation of rice farming. She wished that a bridge of virtuous reconciliation was built with the father; as a result of the couple's successful endeavour, they were redeemed and invited back home to be happily reunited. Through sharing the story in this way, she believed that it would help generate a healing response, and enable the children to learn about the need for reflection and the virtue of forgiveness that the passage of time can bring. She was concerned that she might be imposing creative limitation, but wanted to embrace the opportunity of how a story could be used as an exemplar of a more united, egalitarian experience rather than being fractured and distressing. Christensen (2003) claimed that the influential stance of the adult critic can act as a moral arbiter towards ideas that challenge dominant perceptions of gendered childhoods instead of a protector of child audiences. The timing of the story was important; the children were then served rice pudding for their break as was customary on that day, incorporating a multisensory element to the story. As Tesar (2014) argued, the censoring altered the assertive message of the story, about harder familial decisions necessary to free oneself from tyrannical characters and unhappiness. Building upon the co-constructive participant nature of the Mosaic approach, I incorporated the creative ingenuity of the rice farming into my retelling in the state schools, whilst retaining the protagonist's self-sacrifice for love and happiness over authoritarian patriarchy.

Against the breadth and vicissitudes of life, the fairy tales chosen aimed to present children with specific imaginary life situations that were both possible and beneficial for them to comprehend. They illustrated contentious virtues needed for all genders to form rewarding relationships and the moral dilemmas to be overcome in protecting loved ones and outwitting those who seek to harm them. The findings from the children's responses to the fairy tales and activities are discussed in the following chapter.

5 Children's perspectives

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 used research literature on children's language and social and emotional development to identify ways of understanding their construction of gendered identity and imaginative responses to fairy story stereotypes. Important contributing factors were categorised into three main aspects: gender, culture and power relations; symbolic cultural tools and relationships, emotional expression and imagination; and cultural reinforcement of gender perceptions. In this chapter I examine the data collected from the children's storytelling discussions and activities in order to address the main research question: "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?". The four research sub-questions posed at the end of Chapter 2 will be used to support this study's central investigation.

1. Which dominant discourses did the children raise concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations?
2. Which symbolic cultural influences in the fairy tales did the children identify with?
3. How did the children critically respond to alternative gendered role models and acts?
4. How did the research participants respond to a gender-neutral storytelling approach?

The findings will address each research question in turn, recognising that the answers may sometimes overlap. The analytical interpretations of the findings are presented in the form of mosaic tiles to reflect the philosophy and practice of the Mosaic approach. It will be seen how the mosaic could be used to identify related topics that support a specific theme, thereby enabling a broader range of relevant responses to be given during critical discussions and multimodal activities.

Foucault's (1980) theory of disciplinary power and biopower and Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity will be used, alongside other researchers' theories and research, to discuss and identify points clearly. The children's critical responses, including transcripts of discussions, drawings and photographs of puppets, are presented to enhance the analysis of the data. In order to identify

pertinent points, sometimes the whole section of a transcript is shown, in other cases a single sentence or utterance taken from my observation notes is sufficient.

In the WS kindergarten, only the *Willow Pattern* story was shared as it had been with the state schools. They focused mainly on the traditional hedonic fairy story form of happiness and well-being, and where meaning was given through spiritual and moral discourses that shaped their curriculum. This is in contrast to an eudaimonic approach, which aims to uncover content and the conditions which facilitate or diminish wellbeing, as Deci and Ryan (2008) explained. When contrasting EY sites, it was evident that educational and spiritual philosophy and the power of social control had a significant impact on the choice and censoring of stories, which in turn influenced the children's construction of 'gender' and 'identity'.

5.2 Question 1: Which dominant discourses did the children raise concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations?

Three main tiles arose from the critical discourse findings for this question: self-identification and affirmation (5.2.1), obedience and agency (5.2.2) and careers and opportunities (5.2.3).

5.2.1 Self-identification and affirmation tile

I will examine in this tile the literary cultures of boys and girls, and mixed gender interests. Children's self-identification and affirmations are significant indicators towards their potential receptiveness for transformative thinking and for creating alternative normative statements, which will be discussed.

5.2.1.1 *Boys' cultures and super masculinity*

Dominant stereotypical characters that the boys are presented with as potential role models, along with repeated actions, reinforce hierarchical gendered ranking structures, which contribute towards Butler's (2010:xxx) theory of performativity within the heterosexual matrix. Butler (2010:270) proposed that gender is about pursuing an uninhabited ideal that is rarely achieved, which allows the possibility of change. The boys' favourite story characters included *Iron Man*, *Batman* (Fig. 5.1), *Spiderman* and *The Incredible Hulk*. Danesi (2007) stated, 'Like their ancestors, modern-day people need heroes subconsciously to "make things right" in human affairs, at least in the realm of the imagination' (op. cit.:125).

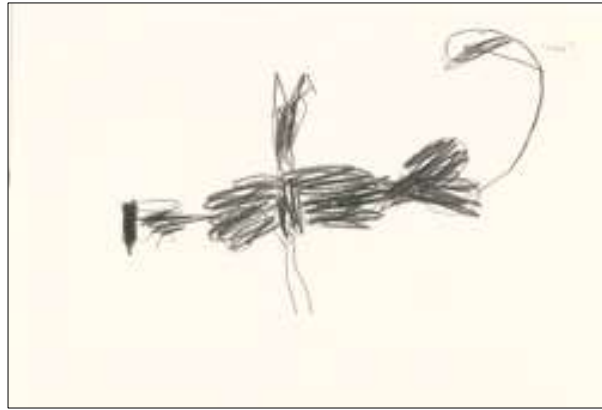


Fig. 5.1 One boy as unbeatable Batman (school A).

The boys' interests particularly lay in the power conflicts between superheroes and anti-heroes (Fig. 5.2). Extending Kristeva's (1986) notion of intertextuality, the superheroes of our time have come to represent fractured characters. The popular set of superheroes arose from comic books during the 1930's depression, followed by the serial publishing during the 1940's military and political turmoil, with the ultimate explosion of the Marvel cinematic universe during the 2008 financial crisis. These literary role models, with all their cultural biases and prejudices, are significant as they are the ones boys and men are often found turning to particularly in threatening circumstances or times of vulnerability. The use of superheroes reflects the strength of stories to combine both political and universal themes, which supports the inculcation of Foucauldian biopower. The propensity to imaginatively depict heroes through visual narratives was evident in the boys' drawings and paper puppet characters.



Fig. 5.2 Doctor Who with his arch-enemy, a Dalek (school B).

From the drawings and discourses as Question 1 investigated, it was evident that disciplinary techniques were the *modus operandi* of the boys towards those who stepped outside of the cultural norms, a regulatory product of biopower as Foucault (1980a) claimed. In the drawing activity about their future selves, one boy expressed the desire to be a local community officer 'who arrests people and reminds them about what good things to do' (Fig. 5.3).



Fig. 5.3 A community officer (school C).

The boys' illustrations indicated an understanding of cultural gendered symbolism that leads to greater cognitive understanding, confirming Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning. As is evident in this boy's choice of colour for the policeperson's uniform, which they are usually characterised as wearing in picture books. The desirable hard acts of heroism contrast with the soft acts and relationships that are encouraged in school. This dichotomy between acceptable actions demonstrates the challenge of different social ideological gender performatives that are required from male childhoods, and the ability that is necessary to navigate successfully between them.

In the older boys' *Molly Whuppie* storytelling discussion and drawing activity, one boy (school C) made an intertextual link to the classical Greek mythological character, Hercules. He drew Hercules riding his horse, gallantly wielding a sword high in the air ready to kill the giant water serpent, the Lernaean Hydra (Fig. 5.4):

R: Can you think of another fairy tale that involves killing a giant?	Subconsciously adapted questioning to gender.
B: I know. Hercules. He has to kill a hydra that has 20 heads and the minotaur. [Loud excited voice, with bodily demonstration.]	Super strength, exaggeration of male aggressive behaviour.
R: That's a classical Greek story. Being brave like Hercules. I think Theseus killed the minotaur. [Sharing cultural knowledge as a Vygotskian MKO].	Emphasising traditional gender virtues.

Hercules, half god and man, was known for his physical strength and bravery; a classical male archetype for masculinity. Kristeva's (1986) theoretical work highlighted how the dominant gendered symbolic order can be progressed through the reflection of characters' roles over time. Notwithstanding Hercules' fortitude and endurance, he is a stereotypical primitive and violent role model, rather than an alternative thoughtful and empathetic one.

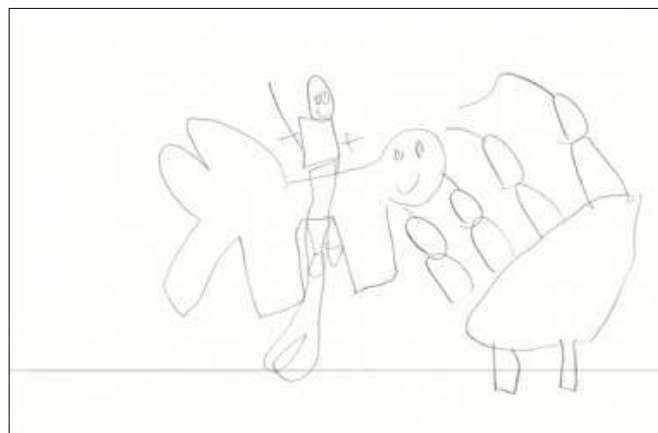


Fig. 5.4 Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra (school C).

In the picture, the boy drew both the warrior and horse with happy facial expressions despite the perilous nature of this quest. This was a rare occurrence and illustrated his enjoyment of victorious heroism encapsulated in the story. In contrast to Dawkins' (cited in Knapton, 2017) scientific objection, Paley (1990:142) had demonstrated that children's narratives can move between fantasy and reality very rapidly, often through metaphorical leaps. By drawing upon his literary knowledge, it was evident the boy was learning how to regulate his behaviour and conform to the norms of stereotypical male acts.

In their dominant discourses of self-identify as Question 1 investigated, the boys did not mention any characters who 'dared to be different' to the cultural norm, as Brooks (2018) had presented. Fairy tales were perceived to be for 'girls-only' as a boy explained: there were no heroic male characters in them. Responding to a perceived 'male invisibility' and rather than passively accepting their lack of status, he assertively rejected the notion. His value of self-worth was in contrast to the passive responses encouraged in the girls, indicating the mechanisms of biopower as signified by Foucault (1995). Boys' heroic stories are often used as means to learn how to negotiate turmoil and disagreement, the girls were not found to mention any heroic themes or anti-heroes in their discussions or role play.

In a mixed Zog group discussion, I asked the question, 'Who was going to win the fight, Sir Gadabout or Zog?' A boy asserted 'No. She dies', as a resistive stance to one girl's rare subversive reply. The girl had initially declared, 'The princess, she does', providing evidence for a potential warrior side. Mello (2001) reflected that Greek mythological characters continue to shape modern discourse, such as *Hercules* and *Xena the Warrior Princess*, both genders having a propensity for combat. It was evident from the children's responses that difficulty could arise in eliciting a critical gendered response in young children using fairy tales. They were unreceptive to the author's message of cross-gender collaboration, preferring the 'naturally' established hierarchical arrangement (Butler, 1988).

The girl demonstrated a contemporary resistant feminist stance for equality and leadership, as advocated by Sinead O'Connor's (2104) album title '*I'm not bossy, I'm the boss*'. Her non-conformist response demonstrated that when a boy asserts himself, he's called a leader, whilst when girls do the same, they are in danger of being branded as 'bossy'. Words, such as feisty or fierce, act as oppressive disciplinary messages of desirable feminine behaviour: don't raise your hand or be angry as invisibility and muteness are best. Misogynist regulation arises from the fact that women who evoke fear are regarded as intimidating, thus powerful and threatening to patriarchy. Saner (2017) commented on the value of fairy tales that subvert the stereotypical prince-and-princess format, abandoning adherence to the no-contest concept of niceness and ensuring increased participation and desire for leadership. The presentation of strong women with a strong voice who are in a strong place, can provide girls with inspiration and encourage boys to be respectful and value the 'other'. The boy's adverse response to the suggestion of the princess's victory, reflects how dominant discourses, which Question 1 investigates,

influence social relationships and gendered perception and acts. As Foucault (1980) denoted on the production of biopower, the boy's disciplinary retort contributes to the patriarchal resistance to the feminine desire for success and equality.

5.2.1.2 *Girls' cultures*

Fairy tales were perhaps the first recorded cultural documents that propounded the idea that beautiful ladies had a remarkably better chance of attaining happiness and material rewards in life. I argue that fairy tales allow children the possibility of deriving their own individual outcomes; however, the patriarchal gendered outcomes are dominant and are inevitably foreclosed upon unless critically challenged. As Butler (1988) contested, gender identities are made real through the frequency and skill of reiterative gendered performances. The girls' uniform drawings of princesses illustrated how children are compelled by each other's behaviour. The pink princess stage, as Ornstein (2011:61) warned, is still very influential for girls, where beauty is synonymous with power. Princesses are always beautiful girls who highlight the importance of beauty in a love relationship; beauty and romance are correlated in children's understanding.



Fig. 5.5 Isla, a Disney princess (school C).

The attention to detail in a girl's illustration (Fig. 5.5) indicated the blueprint a Disney princess has made on her visual schema, which Pullman (2017) noted can have a potential influence on the bodily discourse of gender. The production team of the Disney Animation film *Frozen* (2013) gave the quirky sidekick a stereotypically male clown character with an innocent child-like approach to friendship and love. Yet they could have equally cast a humorous female aide; however, this culturally

undesirable feminine behaviour is resisted and illustrates how social biopower can conceal itself in a disguised form, as Foucault (1980) postulated.

Saner (2017) claimed that fairy tales often present exaggerated masculine and feminine performances to children. In the girls' narrative accounts and drawings, it was evident how the influence of the pink princess culture reflected their preference for feminine word choice, such as the colours mentioned that were stereotypically soft pastel shades: yellow, pink, light pink and silver. The girls' cultural desire for beauty indicated the power and persuasiveness of self-disciplinary practices to create Foucauldian docile bodies. A girl's illustration of a princess with 'swirls and twirls', and big round doll-like eyes mirrored the cartoon 'cute' girly image they are encouraged to emulate (Fig. 5.6):



Fig. 5.6 A swirly twirly princess (school B).

I noted how one older girl enjoyed repeating Princess Pearl's subversive refrain in the Zog storytelling activity which focused her desire not to wear to a 'silly, silly dress', creatively drawing her all in black instead (Fig. 5.7). The activity enabled her to challenge the pretty pink princess culture, which denoted a position of self-worth and self-value in contrast to Clarricoates' (1978) findings and Hoyle's (2017) report, that girls are far less affirmative. In addition, she indicated her aspiration for equality as attributed by Zog's and Princess Pearl's equal stature in her drawing as opposed to the storybook's illustration. As Question 1 investigates, the feminist stance of the girl's response to the dominant discourse of patriarchy can be classified as deviant (Foucault, 1980).



Fig. 5.7 An anti-pink black princess (school C).

The activity leads one girl to creatively consider an emancipatory way through the story world to gain a powerful status through her ability to design, rather than accepting how she is to be passively adorned. Her drawing of the 'designer' mermaid (Fig. 5.8) symbolised her creative aspiration for individual identity and personal autonomy. Mermaids often symbolise softer virtues of benevolence and beneficence. The girl imaginatively created her own inter-visualisation, possibly drawing on Danish author Hans Christian Andersen's, *The Little Mermaid* (1836) and transforming her into a modern-day interpretation. As Rosen (2018) believed, all texts, including those invented by children, are borrowed from those that come before. 'In fact, at every level – word, phrase, clause, paragraph, chapter, genre and motif – previous texts are borrowed' (op. cit.:19).

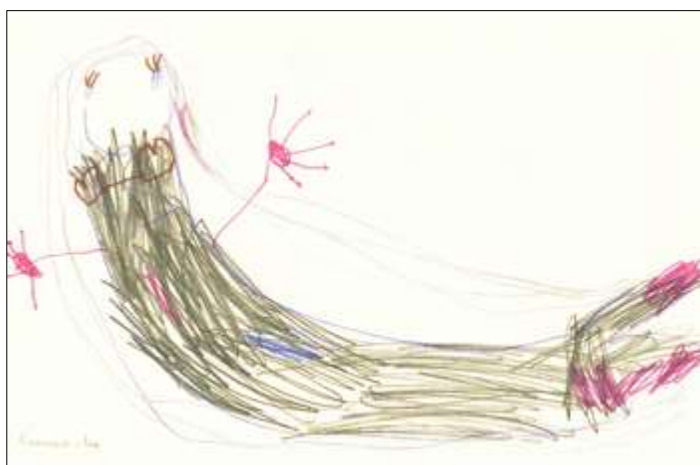


Fig. 5.8 Designer mermaid (school B).

A girls' Zog storytelling group extended their critical responses about physical appearances by recalling their observations about unusual cross-gender variances of heteronormative acts of gendered performativity, as defined by Butler (2006):

R: Who likes wearing dresses?	Researcher bias: only asked this of the girls.
G1: I like having long hair; I like Rapunzel's hair; I'm growing it longer.	Biopower.
G2: You'll never get your hair cut if you're Rapunzel, Jessica.	Identification of fantasy and reality worlds.
G3: Why has the prince got long hair?	Questioning gender performance.
G4: Zach's Dad has long hair as well; he has it in a ponytail; my cousin called Tony has very long hair.	Observation of non-conformist gender behaviour.

The storytelling discussions and activities highlighted the girls' illusion of empowerment and resistance through exaggerated femininity. Their responses indicated how Foucault's (1980) notion of biopower operates through self-surveillance and the production of desire, which hides its restraining nature. In eliciting a critical response to challenge these limiting concepts, I encouraged the girls to appreciate the fluidity of gender through cross-gendered performances and the freedom of expression and individualism it allows. I argue that by inviting the girls to consider similarities rather than differences between the genders, limiting beliefs can be challenged to reduce the binary perceptions of gender. The boys did not voluntarily make any reference to personal experience of cross-gender performances in any of the groups.

5.2.1.3 *Mixed gender interests*

Mixed gender interests are necessary for a gender-blind curriculum approach. In a mixed Zog storytelling discussion, un-stereotypically, a boy mentioned that he liked *Snow White*, possibly carried away with the group discussion. *Snow White* is a fairy story about a girl who is faced with the choice of leaving her home rather than losing it, due to her father's remarriage destabilising the original family structure. In this instance, the mixed group context gave the boy the opportunity to connect with a girl's family turmoil and plight; and her venturing alone into the unknown dark forest,

finding friends and helpers, learning to work and overcoming temptations and trials. Applebee (1978:15-16) discussed how particular stories can help children to relate to their own life experiences and feelings and gain meaningful insights into their own life experiences. The boy took a courageous step in front of his peers to volunteer a cross-gender preference, which many boys are afraid to make for fear of alienation and rebuke. However, no sooner had he offered it, than he became closed, possibly due to the group's amusement, showing his uncertainty towards being subversive. His withdrawal illustrated the operation of Foucault's (1980) biopower that is embedded in social relationships and cultural discourses, regulated through self-disciplinary practices, as Question 1 considers. His response demonstrated the interplay of power and resistance, and showed how conformity to either state can be limiting. The boy's comment furthered Pullman's (2017) observation that diverse gendered perspectives and beliefs can exist even within a small group, with a potential receptiveness to cross-gender identification of emotion.

5.2.2 Obedience and agency tile

A consideration will be given in this tile to the sanctuary of freedoms, relationship goals, and happiness and eudaimonia, and their contribution towards establishing political truth regimes and possible democratic rulings. It will be discussed how restrictive social power can be weakened whilst reconstructing positive gender understandings.

5.2.2.1 *Sanctuary of freedoms*

Fairy tale discussions provided the critical context for the exploration of Butler's (1988) political notion of gendered performative subjectivity concerning voice, agency and equality. Rousseau (2012:127) warned that obedience to traditional roles can hypnotise children into social servitude and produce dependent bodies rather than independent thinkers. This study explores whether gender disidentification can reconstruct and transform discourses and symbols into democratic inscriptions that can form new political ideas of gender equality. Critical checks and balances need to be applied for healthy democratic relations, especially in family relationships. The word 'obey' comes from two Greek words, 'hear' and 'under', meaning to 'listen attentively'. Parental authority, if dispensed wisely, promotes children's well-being, responsibility and self-growth instead of rebellion and self-destruction. Undemocratic rulings can cause rebellious defiance, which can escalate according to the level of perceived oppression. Thus, I questioned the

children about the moral aspect of the daughter's subversive behaviour in the *Willow Pattern* story discussions and whether she was right to disobey her father's marital plans for her. I will now show the range of conformity within the girls' responses; from blind obedience to subservient resistance to violent defiance, depending on their perceptions of subjugation.

Blind obedience: A girls' group perceived the father as the authority figure 'who should be obeyed', compliantly accepting society's hegemonic rules without critical reasoning. Segregation and social hierarchy guarantee relations of domination and the effects of hegemony as Foucault (1995:141) identified, which are still prevalent, as is evident in the girls' conformist responses:

G1: No. Do what her father said.	Subservience.
R: Can you tell me the reason you think that?	
G1: Because then...I don't know....	
G2: Because she had to and her father said she had to.	Oppressive conformity.
R: So, you think she should have obeyed her father?	
G2: Yes.	Non-critical response. Acceptance of subjugation.
R: Would you do what parents asked without questioning?	
GIRLS: Yes.	Position of powerlessness and vulnerability.
R: If she had done what her father had said and told him who she preferred to marry, what do you think would have happened?	
G1: She would've got told off.	Penalty for deviance from cultural desire.
G2: Yes. I think she did, but she was so sad she couldn't marry the prince.	
R: What would have happened if the daughter had obeyed the father?	
G1: Married.	Cultural and political desire.

G1: If she hadn't of disobeyed her father then she wouldn't have got killed.	Cultural biopower's restrictive gendered boundaries.
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The findings illustrate the girls' willingness to subordinate their freedom of speech to patriarchal political values, and the need for critical discussion to challenge the normalisation of their own speech restrictions. Drawing upon Gilligan's (1982) study, the girls' consenting attitudes may be attributable to their fear of isolation by those closest to them and on whom they are dependent. Due to the girls' desire for agreeableness and consensus, their reluctance to negotiate conflict and boundaries can lead to potential vulnerability to unkind carers.

Subservient resistance: In a mixed group, the girls exhibited subversive behaviour, stronger resistance and even defiance in response to being told what to do rather than being regarded as agentic participants:

R: Do you think she shouldn't have disobeyed her father?	
G1: What does disobey mean?	Limited power vocabulary.
R: To not listen and do as commanded.	
G2: No, because she loved the one who loved her.	MKO
G3: Because he shouldn't have this power to say, 'No!' tell her off.	Philosophical reasoning. Recognition of abuse of power.
G4: Because he shouldn't have just told her off and said no.	Rejecting the patriarchal desire to silence women's voices and wishes.
R: Would you obey your parents?	
G3: My parents told me to do something, I wouldn't do it.	
G4: Because I wouldn't listen to them, I would marry someone who I would like to marry.	I'm the boss. Strong, assertive feminine identity.
G2: I would tell them what to do.	Confrontational.

The girls followed the role model of the protagonist of the story. Girl G2 expressed a clear ethical judgement about the father's discipline towards his daughter, forming an emergent appreciation of the democratic bedrock of positive relationships. Despite being young, it was evident that they were learning to raise their voices by joining in practices to forge a new culture from what they see around them and the stories they hear. They were grasping the importance of *parrhesia*, linked with courage to speak the truth and risk-take, as Foucault (1983) postulated: '*Parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, regardless of the risks, because he recognises truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)' (op. cit.:19-20). The girls' desire to have a stronger voice could have been due to the fact that they were in a mixed-group, which meant they were having more exposure and experience of critical discussions involving conflict and competition.

Violent Defiance: A girl declared extreme resistant passive-aggressive behaviour due to her emotional subjugation, physically abusing a vulnerable sibling, rather than directly expressing her frustrations and desires. Rousseau (2012:380) reasoned that oppressive misery can be an outcome of hierarchical ruling, demanding obedience and dependency. In this group, a lot of frustration was evident, with three girls expressing upset retorts, not just one:

R: If you weren't happy about a decision your parents had made, what would you do?	Debate the balance of individual liberty and social equality.
G1: I would kick my sister.	Frustration.
G2: I would too.	Lack of experience in confrontation.
G3: I would go up to my bedroom and be really, really angry.	Injustice of the abuse of individual liberty/their rights – lack of voice.

The girls' range of responses illustrates the complexity of power relations regarding oppression that can constrain them and result in negative outcomes. The discussion enabled the truth of unequal power relations to be examined and demonstrated insurrection against subjugated knowledges, as Foucault (2003) recognised. The safe and judgement-free context allowed the girls to express an un-stereotypical

hard-emotional response, anger, that can be energising and provide a sense of control, which they are encouraged by society to suppress. Stories help to give certainty and reassurance to the emotions children similarly experience; girl G3's open and volatile expression of anger is similar in manner to Max's in Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*. This discussion demonstrates how SRE (Sex and Relationship Education) is essential in supporting children's emotional development to prevent a chain of abuse.

Only in a girls' *Willow Pattern* story discussion did a girl's aesthetic response include a prayer, appealing to a higher authority for support against a tyrannical figurehead: 'Because they could pray and say, "Please Dad, can I do it?"' She subconsciously recognised that there are limits to authoritarian sovereignty and law when it becomes corrupted; St. Augustine expounded, 'an unjust law is no law at all' (Asher and Simpson, 1994:2058). Christian ideology maintains that if a head of the household or leader begins to plunge his dependents into tyranny and lawlessness, then they will be held accountable to a higher law and enduring source of justice. The girl expressed an early philosophical understanding of spiritual citizenship.

5.2.2.2 *Relationship goals*

Butler (1988) posited that patriarchy nurtures restrained childhoods, in boys as well as in girls, with artificial gendered conventions appearing both natural and essential unless challenged. In determining "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?", the story discussion about why Prince Ronald did not respond favourably to Princess Elizabeth's dotage enabled the boys to empathise with his resistance to the cultural desire to marry. The critical conversation provided an opportunity to explore possibilities and oppressive truth regimes, which McLeod and Giardiello (2019:115) recommended towards positively transforming power relations for eudaimonia.

To further Butler's (1988) research on subjective performativity and the formation of egalitarian power relations, this study considered whether the presentation of conservative, traditional expectations in stories can limit children's personal understanding. To prompt the boys' engagement with discourses beyond the stereotypical norms and expectations, and to investigate Question 1, I raised alternative possibilities. Initially, boy B1 identified with the Prince's feelings, and critically reasoned that he may not want to go down the path of matrimony:

B1: Not happy – maybe he doesn't want to be married.	Resistance to conformity. Independent thought.
B2: Because he doesn't want to hug her or kiss.	Sexual side of the relationship.
B3: Maybe they don't want to live together.	Personal agency.
B4: ...smack each other.	Stereotypical violent response, rather than peaceful negotiation action.
R: Find someone else or not get married at all....	Challenge truth of cultural norms.
B5: Yes, can you live on your own?	Unfamiliar with critical thinking.
B6: You can't get married if you don't want to live together, you can live on your own too.	Knowledge of alternative non-conformist cultural options.

Boy B4's aggressive response indicated the potential frustration in living up to desired cultural expectations, which can lead to a physical expression of anger at the thought that his freedom of choice may be denied. Lamont (2019) stressed how the failure of trying to fit into the mould of heteronormative male performative acts could be linked to the rise of mental illness due to social stigma. Boy B6's resistant response revealed how hegemonic heteronormative expectations can be challenged in critical discussions, which allows for transformative thought.

In a boys' *Willow Pattern* story discussion, two boys initially expressed a strong negative desire to getting married, expressing the preference for male solitary life rather than an intimate shared partnership, as established by Gilligan (1982):

B1: What does to become married mean?	
R: Finding a husband or finding a wife... If you're a boy, you find a wife; and if you're a girl, you find a husband.	Researcher bias. Traditional explanation, non-challenging.
B2: I don't even want to be married.	Non-conformist desire.
B3: I don't.	Group identity.



Fig. 5.9 Growing-up and transforming into a soldier (school B).

Two boys did value the right of the freedom of choice attachment over hegemonic ruling; their isegoric responses with the focus on the equal right to speak showed that they were potentially open to progressive cross-gender relationships. This might be due to the critical exploration of the social ideological tensions that existed within the relationships in the story.

5.2.2.3 Happiness and eudaimonia

In a girls' *Willow Pattern* story discussion, the girls indicated that they believed, like beauty, that money was the 'panacea of all ills'. To elicit a gendered critical response, I encouraged them to consider both eudaimonic and hedonistic goals and how they can overlap and blur as in real life, as Deci and Ryan (2008) identified. Furthering the findings of Isbell *et al.* (2004), one girl commented: 'Rich people are happy people', indicating a higher cognitive understanding of truth regimes about happiness and relevancy gained by critically reflecting upon the correlation between money and stability. In response to my challenging philosophical questions on the big issues of life, such as who they would marry if they were in Koong-se's position, Girl G2 gave an extremely worldly-wise pragmatic suggestion:

R: Who was the man the father chose?	Cultural story knowledge.
G1: Ta-jin.	Story memory.
G2: Who was the one who had lots of islands and money?	Identification of successful alpha male.
G3: Ta-jin I think.	
R: Who would you choose to marry?	Encouraging personal agency.

G2: Ta-jin, because I would want to live in this world there, if it had really lots of horses and really lots of chocolate.	Child desires.
R: What if your 'friend' really liked you?	
G2: They could come and visit me	Higher cognitive reasoning.

Through her transaction with the text, it was evident that girl G2 had critically rationalised and thought about the consequences of choices. The mediational triangle, as suggested by Cole (1996:272-276), formed by my dialogical questioning, enabled her to imaginatively respond and find solutions to the dilemma of choosing between two suitors: one offering great wealth with her as his 'trophy' bride, the other the warmth of his heart yet nowhere to call home.

In a mixed group, girl G1 surprisingly reinforced a self-disciplinary notion of subjugation to the mandarin's daughter:

R: Why do you think love is more important?	
G1: Because she is so spoilt.	Misogynistic view.
G2: Because she's so sweet.	Patriarchal desire: un-feminist view.

Girl G1's misogynistic response could have been due to the fact that girls who experience having their own lives marginalised, may self-govern and restrict the possibilities of others, as Foucault (2008:22) recognised. The story discussions have the potential to challenge these subordinate views, including those of girl G2, for girls to be 'sweet'. This was evident in another mixed group, where a girl philosophically contemplated whether you can be 'nice' and 'rich' at the same time. She considered the moral tension between wealth and righteousness by questioning whether they were very 'nice' people, especially as femininity principally requires you to be 'nice'. Through an engagement with the synergistic process of critically listening to and interpreting the story, this study demonstrated how gendered responses to morality can be elicited.

5.2.3 Future careers and opportunities tile

Careers and opportunities are influenced by the associations between gender, culture and power relations as identified in Question 1. A discussion of this tile will

involve an examination of diversity and equality in children’s future aspirations and domestic responsibilities. The unequal division of domestic labour was objected to by De Beauvoir (1949) in her statement, ‘Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework’ (op. cit.:470). I will examine how conformity to heteronormative practices can be challenged through encouraging critical gendered responses to overcome cultural prejudices and inner self-regulating practices.

5.2.3.1 Diversity and equality

The storytelling discussions and activities enabled philosophical consideration about the heteronormative rules that curtail children’s explorations and rights to equality and justice (Butler, 1988; Okin, 1989). In a girls’ Zog storytelling activity, they discussed the future roles they saw for themselves, and this gave me an opportunity to explore their views on gender equality and agency:

R: What would you like to be when you grow up?

G1: A princess with lots of shiny jewels.	Feminine expression.
G2: Doctor. I have a doctor coat and it has pockets. I have a doctor coat and I put the doctor things in my pockets	Stylised repetition of performance.
G3: A dragon.	Powerful.
G4: I really want to be a princess.	Replicating cultural desire.
G5: Doctor. White coat and a white cross. Or a red cross I mean. A red cross. I like to wear wellington boots and a stethoscope.	
G3: I would like to become an artist.	Creative soft vocation, inward orientated.
G4: Me too.	Group identity and belonging.
G5: I want to be an astronaut.	Alternative outward focused suggestion.
G4: Really? [Exclamation].	
G6: I am going to be a princess when I grow up and not the knight, because, it’s just girls.	Asserting restrictive self-governance of cultural desires.

G2: You can't be a princess when you grow up, you have to have a job.	Contemporary aspiration.
G3: You have to be a mum and have to look after babies.	Patriarchal desire.
G2: You can't be a princess astronaut.	Resistance to alternative. Self-governance.
G5: Why not?	Re-production of knowledge and power.
G3: You can always be a mum actually.	Biological determinism and female choice.

Girl G3 illustrated her desire to be a dragon, and another girl expanded on this and wished to be the 'madame dragon' teacher (Fig. 5.10). Her visual response presented the significant influence of how stories can educate children to inculcate desired gendered truths and knowledge and thereby limit creativity, as Rousseau (2012) conjectured.



Fig. 5.10 Madame Dragon Teacher (school B).

Girl G2 recalled her home story experience and replied 'doctor' as she had a doctor's coat and could put things in it, and which was reflected in her drawing. Her critical response extended Butler's theory (1988; 2010) on gender performativity and the repetitive stylised acts by validating positive gender norms. Girl G5 reiterated a community-caring mind-set by considering the role as a red cross worker. She initially drew a white coat with a pencil cross before correcting herself by declaring it should be red, and then stereotypically colouring it all in pink (Fig. 5.11). The princess's desire to be a flying doctor provided an inspirational role model for the girls to explore adventurous non-conformist alternative roles.



Fig. 5.11 A red-cross worker.

In determining how to elicit a critical gendered response, the evidence indicated that the girls were progressively deliberating both fantastical and realistic alternative careers to the traditional role of motherhood. This evidence challenges Hoyle's (2017) report that girls' aspirations mainly replicate the nineteen-fifties' narrow gendered perspectives on jobs, such as the caring or beauty professions. Conversely, it was the boys' aspirations that were found to be more traditional and scientifically orientated (Fig. 5.12), and those that required physical strength, such as (dragon) pilots and jockeys 'riding good on a horse'.



Fig. 5.12 A famous scientific inventor (school C).

By contrast, the girls' drawings reflected mostly stereotypical expectations about their future selves as opposed to the progressive ideas and self-belief they expressed in the storytelling sessions. Unlike the boys in relation to their transitioning 'manhood' which Lamont (2019) argued they were struggling with, the girls were developing a real sense of '*knowing* what it is like to be a woman', as Steedman (1982:127) discovered. She reasoned that the girls understood that their job was 'to grow up and become women' (op. cit.:153). The storytelling discussion exposed an awareness of the continuing tension for women, the conflicting hedonistic balance between careers and personal fulfilment and dutiful family responsibility and expectations. My argument therefore is that boys and girls need exposure to a wider variety of role models as presented in fairy tales, with strong powerful characters and heroic actions that are rounder, more aspirational and emancipatory. The post-feminist myth that equality can generally be achieved through individualism is far from empowering girls; as the evidence demonstrates, it is still entrapping them. The boys rejected any desire to be teachers, as Biddulph (1997) noted, due to the dominant feminised discourse of child care that needs to be transformed, as Question 1 highlighted.

5.2.3.2 *Domestic responsibilities*

The boys' drawings of the magic cakes showed their interest and enjoyment in baking. In the *Donkeyskin* storytelling discussions, the boys explained how they would not bake for the princess as it was a sign of love from the princess to the prince. They could not conceive of it being possible the other way around, revealing

the gender restrictions on the expression of affection. Many of the boys' cakes reflected stereotypical magic powers to overthrow enemies. One boy showed how his cake only fired at people he did not like, and for another, eating his cake would impart magic powers. This evidence extends Butler's (2010) theory of the way in which stylised repetition of corporeal acts occurs in many different discourses. In a mixed group, a boy decorated his cake with sparkles that would make you 'super-strong' so you could lift tables and rockets. His imaginative response illustrated the cognitive movement of ideas from the realistic to the fantastical, enabling possible alternative ideas to be proposed (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 2009). The influence of the girls' princess language on him was also evident. In another mixed group, one boy drew an imaginative rain-making cake (Fig. 5.13), and as another boy drew his banana cake, he expressed a rare altruistic purpose, 'a cake to help people get better like my banana medicine'. The boys' creative responses supported Mendelsohn *et al.*'s (2018) findings that reading fairy tales to children enhances their social and emotional development, and hence the importance of EY SRE programmes.



Fig. 5.13 A rain making cake (school B).

In a girls' storytelling discussion, cultural female bias towards domesticated tasks was evident, confirming Foucault's (1995) notion that the production of social power is embedded in the networks of practice within all microlevels of everyday life. As he argued, power is 'exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations' (op. cit.:94). Girl G1's gendered response extends Robnett and Susskind's (2010:820) research into 8- to 9-year-old children's friendships, that indicated same-gender bias due to the allocation of more positive traits towards their own gender than to the other:

R: Do you think it should be only girls cooking cakes?	
GIRLS: Yes [chorus].	
R: [Surprise] Can you tell me why you think that?	Encouraging children to challenge conformist view.
G1: Because they are better than boys cooking	Gender favouritism.
G2: And it's prettier and pink and it makes you have powers and boys don't really like powers.	Female world.
G3: They do like frozen powers Ava.	
G2: <i>Frozen</i> ?	
G3: Yeh.	
G2: They hate <i>Frozen</i> ! There's girls in there.	Cultural knowledge of bias towards boys.
G3: I know but there are princes in there too.	Modern childhood: beta males admirable too.
G4: Tom said he had a <i>Frozen</i> calendar.	Exchange of social knowledge of cross-gender interest.
G3: See!	

From the transcript it is evident that dialogical conversations can critically challenge restrictive self-regulatory practices with alternative viewpoints, thereby limiting self-subjugation and the development of Foucauldian docile bodies. The discussion about 'Tom' enabled the truth about symmetrical gendered binary categorisation to be critically questioned. Butler (2010) advocated that this was necessary for discursory movement along the continuum of ideological positionings.

One girl called upon her intertextual memory in a storytelling activity, recalling the fairy-tale character *Little Red Riding Hood* (Fig. 5.14). This picture was slightly out of context and highlighted that she may not have been able to draw the bodily shape of a man as she might not have been encouraged to do so before.



Fig. 5.14 Little Red Riding Hood (school C).

The girl explained how by eating her gingerbread man cake '*you get to eat yourself*'; she had creatively altered the *Donkeyskin* story plot through adding a rare cannibalistic element. This activity enabled her to resist the established limited feminine schema of 'niceness'. In a later *Hansel and Gretel* shape game activity, this resistance to conformity was developed by the girls conjuring up revolting recipes; a subconscious subversion of the subordinate role of being the good homemaker (Fig. 5.15) leading to servitude (Rousseau, 2012).



Fig. 5.15 Worm ice-cream (school C).

With the mention of boys almost frowned upon, the female bias revealed the strength of biopower on the self-governance of gender identification that occurred within the groups as Foucault (1995) espoused, forming distinct sub-cultures within the classrooms.

Same-sex friendships were found to be equally favoured amongst both the boys and the girls. In a mixed group (school C), two girls chose to work together partly due to the collaborative nature of the study, which allowed the creative metamorphosis of shared ideas and understandings. One girl described how 'if you can eat this you can fly', whilst the other girl added, 'if you eat this you will turn into fire'. Their powerful visual discourse extended Abdelmoneim's (Hoyle, 2017) study on gendered affirmations, and their dynamic responses indicated how their absorption of the boys' powerful schemata was having a significant impact on their imaginations despite the softness of their illustration (Fig. 5.16).



Fig. 5.16 Flying fire-ball balloon cake (school C).

At the beginning of the activities, the girls positioned the boys as different from themselves, but over the course of the discussion they began to progressively think about overlaps of similarities and commonalities of acts. Following Mello's (2001)

research, my challenging role as a Vygotskian MKO encouraged the girls to shake-up limiting perspectives to reflexively deconstruct their gendered value systems and positions. Similarly, the boys' enthusiastic drawing of magic cakes supported the potential development of gender-neutral attitudes to traditional domesticated activities.

Butler (1988:526) and Mallan (2009:14) emphasised the need to critically challenge oppressive gendered acts, such as household labour, which Layard (2020:169-170) reported continues to be unequally shared. Thus, I encouraged the boys in a *Hansel and Gretel* storytelling group to philosophically consider an egalitarian approach to domestic duties:

R: Do you think boys can clean as well as girls?	Equality of household responsibilities.
B1: Boys can clean well.	
R: If that is so, why do you think the witch chose the girl?	
B2: She was being too babyish	Self-disciplinary judgement.
B3: Because she was smallest.	Diminishing language.

The boys' confident responses in their domestic abilities showed that fairy tales can help to shape ideas of cultural capital and can be potential moral agents for social change. To bring about progressive transformations, the story-teller's role as mediator, as Cole (1996) described, can be seen as necessary to challenge misogynistic stances and encourage openness to equality of roles within the home. This was critically explored in the boys' 'shape' drawing activity, positioning them in a reverse scenario of subjugation by the alternate 'other' - older women - contrary to patriarchal ruling; they found the storytelling experience of female dominance and entrapment disturbing (Fig. 5.17).



Fig. 5.17 A boy's 'shape' drawing of Hansel's cage (school C).

In a girls' Hansel and Gretel group, one girl assumed that Gretel had been the one trapped. The girls' passive responses suggested they were already accustomed through traditional 'Disney' type fairy tales to inculcate truths into having their freedom curtailed, as Rousseau (2012) posited. Another girl's surprising desire to be Hansel in the cage reflected her unfamiliarity with agency, the experience of passive docility resonating more comfortably with her. Through the process of critical reflection, the girls began to question the nature of their identity against the power of restrictive practices of gendered ideologies and beliefs. This process broadened Kristeva's (1980) intertextual decoding research on exploring the historical association of power in gendered relationships.

5.2.4 Summary

In the study's central investigation "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?", through Question 1 and the dominant discussions concerning gender, power and culture, three tiled themes emerged: self-identification; careers and opportunities; obedience and agency (Fig. 5.18).

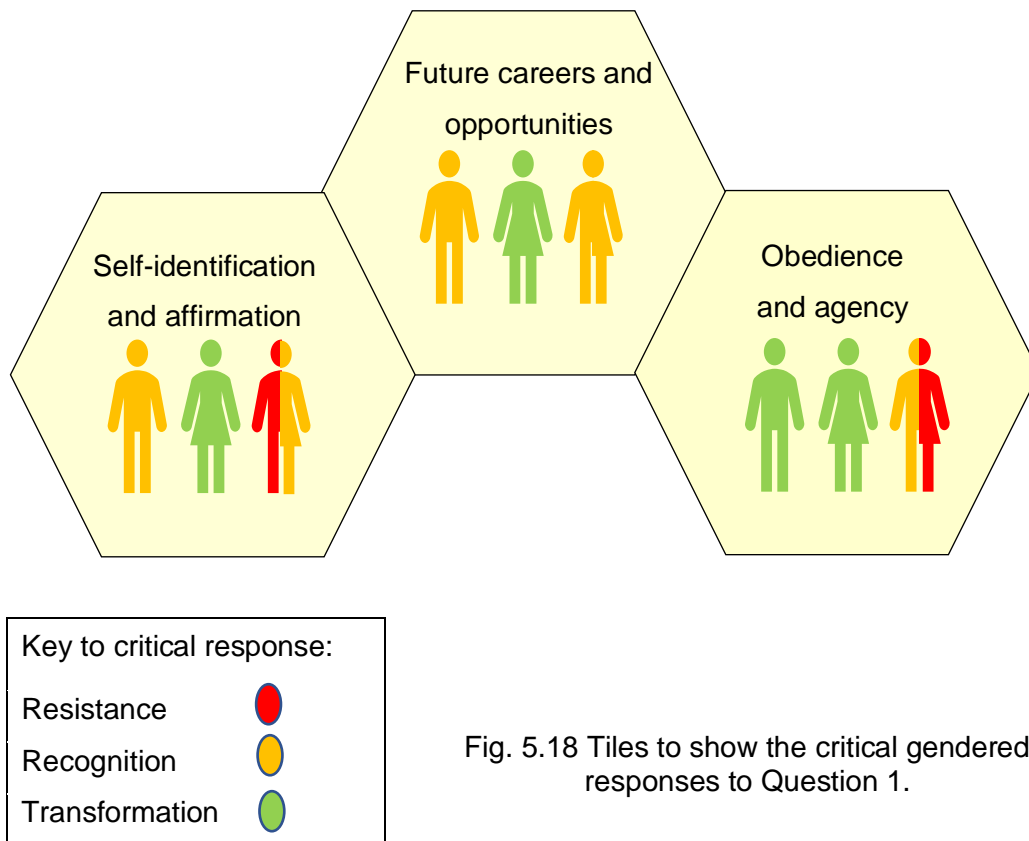


Fig. 5.18 Tiles to show the critical gendered responses to Question 1.

Self-identification and affirmation. It was evident that many of the boys strongly conformed to traditional cultural concepts of masculinity, whilst the girls began to show some critical resistance to the pink princess culture by the imaginative consideration of modes and alternative performances of femininity (Ornstein, 2011). In the mixed group, cross-gender identification was frowned upon by the boys due to self-regulatory behaviours arising from a desire to conform to the biopower of patriarchal society (Foucault, 1995). The girls were more open to identifying with the boys and found to desire egalitarian power relationships due partly to their adherence to the social ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982).

Obedience and agency. The benefit of the critical discussions was evident when cross-gender friendships became un-stereotypically considered in the boys' groups in contrast to the social role theory, as denoted by Saner (2017). The girls began to offer advanced critical and philosophical responses to hierarchal structures and rules (Vygotsky, 1978; Butler, 1988; Holland, 2003), and knowledge of historical power relations (Kristeva, 1980). Interestingly, in a mixed group, it was the girls who applied self-subjugation and discipline practices to the female protagonists, demonstrating the iterative nature of their own marginalisation, thereby creating docile bodies (Foucault, 1995) and the need for positive affirmations.

Future careers and opportunities: Through the critical consideration of domestic acts, such as baking, a greater equitable understanding was generated amongst the boys (Mendelsohn *et al.*, 2018). Hoyle's (2017) report suggested that girls' scientific career choices were widening, but I noted that in the girls' groups, although non-traditional scientific careers were mentioned in verbal discourse, these ideas were not reflected in their drawings. This omission indicated the need for a greater variety of role models and experiences, including those in the private realm of the homestead. In the mixed group, the confident 'hard' performance by the boys was found to positively influence the girls' self-affirmations, but this was only evident when working in same-sex pairs.

In all the cases it is evident that in the mixed groups the girls made the least progress in transformative critical thinking, whilst in the single-sex groups they made the greatest progress overall.

5.3 Question 2: Which symbolic cultural influences in the fairy tales did the children identify with?

From the critical discourse four tiles arose: hierarchical symbolism (5.3.1), heroic symbolism (5.3.2), efferent and aesthetic symbolism (5.3.3) and emotional symbolism (5.3.4). These tiles support eliciting a critical gendered response in young children as they identify the power of cultural symbolism, and whether they are adopting outward or inward perspectives that in turn affects their levels of confidence and governing perceptions of self-worth.

5.3.1 Hierarchical symbolism tile

I will argue in this tile that children's lexical use of language is significantly influenced by the ways that stories and characters are presented to them (Appendix 9). Lyotard (1984) proposed that fairy tales prescribe to children the cultural gendered norms and normativity that are required by society. In this study, the boys were found to use expansive language, such as *giant*, *super* and *big*, which drew on the super-masculine concept of being 'powerful and strong'. Dominant language encourages a belief in male supremacy and the promotion of the macho image of strength and forcefulness. Conversely, the girls were found to use diminishing and understating words, such as *little* and *tiny*. The girls' use of words that denoted inferiority can have a self-perpetuating, diminishing effect on their self-belief and self-worth.

In a *Zog* mixed storytelling activity group, a girl yearned for invisibility and remarked how she was drawing ‘a *little, little* worm in a *big* pot of soil’. This self-deprecating language might begin to answer Simmons’ (2010) question: When the opportunities and possibilities for girls have never been so good, why is their confidence lagging centuries behind that of the boys? Similarly, in a single-sex *Molly Whuppie* storytelling activity, another girl claimed that eating her cake would make you shrink, reiterating the reduction of status and importance. Her imaginary idea of conformity to female docility is similar to that portrayed by Alice, the female protagonist, in Lewis Carroll’s (1865) *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. She experimented with size and power before rebelling against Victorian patriarchy by being assertive, active and curious. Interestingly, in a mixed group, when two girls chose to work together, they subconsciously grew in confidence and described how when you ate their cake it would make you grow *bigger*. The girls were learning to have confidence in their own voices and ability to solve their problems independently. The results of the drawing activity indicated that although these gendered messages are deeply ingrained, there is potential for growth and understanding about self-worth and self-value, contributing towards individual well-being.

When identifying alternative gender behavioural traits, the children gendered the language according to the action, rather than to the character. For instance, when the girls mentioned an aggressive action, I observed how they adopted expansive language as seen with girl G3’s comment, hence adding a masculine facet to any powerful action:

R: What did Gretel do to the witch in the story?

G1: She pushed her in the microwave. Strong male action.

G2: It’s not called a microwave [laughs].

G3: The witch stood on the stool, put her head in the oven and then Gretel gave her a big mighty push.

R: Very good. Yes, she did give her a big mighty push. How do you think Gretel felt when she pushed the witch into the oven?

G4: Happy. Pro-social emotion.

G5: Strong. I’m Gretel. Positive self-affirmation.

R: You’re Gretel...would you like to be Gretel?

G5: I'm *super* strong.

Reinforcement of self-affirmation.

It is interesting that the girls focused on body and non-verbal discourses, which Butler (2010) stressed was often the case. As part of the storytelling discussion, girl G5's aesthetic response indicated an admiration of Gretel's strength of character displayed and consequent desire to be like her. Girl G5's verbal wish reflected the flexibility of identity politics and her production of knowledge about the variety of paths that can lead to the desired feminist power of agency, as Rowe (2005) captured in her notion of differential belonging. The story discussion supported positive and assertive self-identification rather than compliance to a diminutive feminine figure.

By changing the emphasis in the use of language towards the female protagonist role model, the girls connected with an alternative positive perception of themselves. Girl G5's assertive response indicated how some of the children's gendered perceptions were still open and not fixed, as Butler (1988) maintained. The cross-over in the use of gendered language towards the protagonist enabled them to consider the strength of character needed to overthrow oppression, such as enforced domesticity and women's suppression of others entrapped in the role. I would suggest that sharing the story in the single-sex group and the effect of the storyline, which switched the gender of the leading protagonist from male to female, supported this transformative thinking.

5.3.2 Heroic symbolism tile

I will present in this tile the influence of biopower and heroic symbolism on children's moralistic perspectives, and developing skills for leadership and dominance. In children's literature it is mostly male characters who dominate the action (McCabe *et al.*, 2011:199; Lifting Limits, 2018). The boys were found to be particularly eloquent in the use of language concerning violence and lethal weapons, which influenced their self-perceptions and self-regulating gendered behaviours, as denoted by Foucault (1980). The evidence indicated that they were learning the knowledge and use of aggressive language from a variety of sources, such as from adult males, their peers and, in particular, from media story heroes. I have italicised the children's use of key vocabulary as a way of highlighting their male performativity and interests in the transcripts. These results enhance Munson

et al.'s (2015) research, which suggested children are active in discerning the role models they follow and the language they use. I further argue that the boys' action hero role model's aggressive violence and bloody killings for the sake of the greater good, reflects society's blithe acceptance of macho anti-social behaviour. The benefit of the cultural superhero and male prowess was found to support boys' resistance to self-deprecation; their weakness was in developing a false sense of superiority rather than equality or parity.

In the Zog activity session the boys explained, in precise detail, the operation of their combat weapons and space ships in order to tackle the baddies. Their disciplinary responses extended Foucault's (1980a) process of normalisation and deviancy, and the strength of power to make the desired norms appear morally right: 'Power is strong, this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the levels of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it' (op. cit.:59). The knowledge and desire to emulate cultural role models, as the boys demonstrate, leads to punitive strategies designed to oppress deviants:

B1: This is my <i>super</i> gun and it would beam Jamie up, because it has a super sucker and it can suck all the models and then we would have the <i>power</i> to get him.	Identification of deviant outside desired norm.
B2: My <i>Super Sucker</i> would suck all the <i>powers</i> up – then it would have every single <i>power</i> up to get every baddie, because there are some really <i>baddies</i> around.	Surveillance practice of deviants.
B3: This a ripper. It <i>kills</i> robbers.	Extreme disciplinary strategy.

Furthering Giugni's (2006) findings, the children's moral discourse clearly supported the desire for participation in the heroic group and to create a sense of belonging. In addition, the boys' power-based expressions were captured in their illustrations; for instance, I was cheerfully informed by a boy that by making special connections to wires, the Super Continuation Killer 'made everything dead that it touched' (Fig. 5.19).



Fig. 5.19 A Super Continuation Killer (school A).

The boy's informative description of the Super Continuation Killer revealed knowledge and understanding that far outstripped his symbolic drawing capability, as Coates and Coates (2016:75) discovered. As a researcher, this was something I needed to be mindful of when working with young children; the importance of noting both their visual and verbal expression of experiences to gain a deeper understanding of their critical thinking processes.

In a mixed group, another boy called upon his fairy tale memory and sketched a magic green troll's glove to take with him on his adventures. In juxtaposition, he then drew a deadly scientific transformer (Fig. 5.20), because his friend had drawn a diagram of a micro-controller eagle.

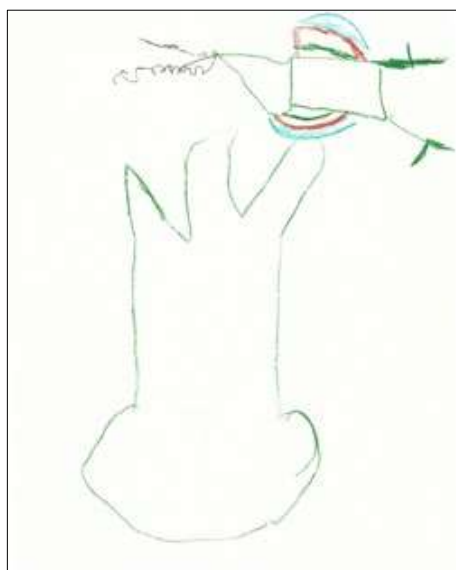


Fig. 5.20 A magic green troll's glove and a micro-controller (school B).

His inclusion of the intertextual science fiction element builds upon Coates' (2002:35) findings that the influence of peers can alter the content and directions of drawings. His illustrative movement between the fantastical and scientific positionings indicating the potential for differential belonging beyond strict binary identities, as Rowe (2005) suggested, and hence the diversification of and within gender roles.

The boys' story interests were found to include the principle 'bigger is better', as Clarricoates (1978:357) discovered in her study. In a boys' *Zog* drawing activity, one boy gave a detailed technical description of his oversized *Transformers* (Fig. 5.21).



Fig. 5.21 Transformers with air packs (school A).

B1: I'm going to do two Transformers; they're going to have an air pack... I'm going to put some *super-powers* in my air pack.

B2: Well you can't do that.

Establishment of authenticity:
differentiation between reality and fantasy.

B1: I can I got one at home.

Assertiveness.

B3: My big Transformer is going to be amazing.

Exaggeration.

B1: Mine is <i>really good</i> . All my transformers are going to be orange. Now to transform it again, I need this colour to colour the shield in. This is going to be my shield protector. Transformer-bot and Transformer <i>Good</i> . A boomer shield to conquer.	Interest in colour. Detailed knowledge. (Fig.5.22).
B4: Who is he <i>killing</i> ?	Conformist heroic action.
B1: He's going <i>to kill</i> the man afterwards. Now I need the red. This is the man he's <i>killing</i> ; can you see the red bit? [Shows the researcher]. This is where the <i>blood</i> is.	Colour symbolism.
B2: If you poke someone in the back really hard that would <i>make your blood come out</i> . My grandpa was dead before I was born.	Peer MKO. Intergenerational reflection.
B4: My papa was in both the World Wars. WW1 and WW2.	Personal transaction
R: My grandfather was too old to fight in either of the world wars as he was over 40, and so he served as a Special Constable.	Co-participant in conversation.

The macho auto-bot action figures were created for a significantly older age group and feature in science fiction action films, which encourage hard and powerful behavioural and emotional responses to personal challenges.



Fig. 5.22 A spinning red shield, its rotation denoted by arrows (school C).

In a boys' *Willow Pattern* storytelling session, the narrative provided Rosenblatt's (1978) and Long's (2017) imaginative *living through* experience and displayed the boys' stylised bodily performances. As Butler (1988) contested, the embellishment of violent macho action supports continued heteronormativity:

R: Ta-jinn vowed that one day he would track down Cheng and Kong-se....	
B1: What does 'vowed' mean?	Curiosity in meaning of words.
R: ...made a promise to himself, make an oath that he's going to hold no matter what ...Ta-jinn found out about Cheng's farm.	
B2: Is that his secret land? [Excitedly examining the plate.]	'Living through' experience.
R: What do you think Ta-jinn did to him once he found him?	
B3: I think he ran off...	Participant-spectatorship.
B4: He would kill him.	Heroic action.
B5: He stabbed him to the heart.	Advanced vocabulary.
B4: Ahhhhh... [Falling to the floor with a loud thud.]	

From boy B4's dramatic response, it is evident that he was actively speculating on and anticipating the heroic action, and brought the character to life by his role playing (Harding, 1962:134). The boys were receptive to the gendered acts and performances that reinforced their masculinity and dominance over others (Butler, 1988:530). Although the benefit of strong heroes has been seen, alternative peace orientated roles, such as Chang's, the entrepreneurial rice farmer, are needed to counterbalance boys' desire for conformity towards scripted ideological acts of macho aggressiveness for conflict resolution (Brooks, 2018; Kemp, 2018).

A mixed *Zog* storytelling discussion provided an opportunity for children to share story meanings and interpretations of their worlds. It was evident that the children were getting really excited by the story, egging one another on and imaginatively adopting an aesthetic stance by introducing their own story script:

R: The mother and all the babies. ‘Now that you have been shown you can practise on your own. And you will all be expert flyers by the time you are fully grown.’	Heteronormative acts.
G1: The green one, the green one has fallen down!	Spectatorship.
G2: And he is going to hurt his head again like the orange one.	Empathy.
B1: He’s going to bang his head like...	Bodily observation.
B2: And blood is coming out.	Interest in gory gruesome aspect.

The girls’ responses indicated how they were critically inferring the green dragon’s injuries following Gilligan’s (1982) ethics of care, whilst the boys were connecting with stereotypical bodily acts and consequences. According to Paley (2007), ‘young children disclose more of themselves as characters in a story than as participants in a discussion’ (op. cit.:159). The child-authored storylines provided a deeper insight into their gendered worlds and the symbolic cultural influences upon the production of knowledge and power, as proposed by Foucault (1980). This disclosing behaviour showed how a pedagogical interactive model for change can be generated. Change can be formed through the use of ‘pedagogies of choice’ following Vygotskian interest in cultural tools to support language and higher cognitive imaginative processes. This strategy allowed children’s funds of gendered knowledge and desires, created by biopower, to become prominent, as proposed by Foucault (1980). As the children created their own story-lines, my pedagogical role as the ‘knower constructor’ of societal gendered expectations was disrupted, empowering their voices and enabling a co-construction of progressive models. Thought needs to be given to the models and acts that are encouraged, and how they can incorporate the gender predispositions to form more balanced interpretations and creations.

It was in a mixed group that a rare incidence of a girl drawing a sword occurred (Fig. 5.23), indicating her liberation from the suppression and cultural disbelief in girls’ potential for aggression. This is essential for gendered liberation and empowerment as Butler (2010) contested, because simply perceiving women, traditional or modern, as one-dimensional nurturers keeps girls stuck in a disempowering heteronormative position.



Fig. 5.23 A two-thousand-year-old sword (school C).

Similar to the legend of *King Arthur*, this girl imaginatively explained how the sword was two thousand years old and could be found at the bottom of a wishing well. She mainly focused on the mythical element as indicated by her rainbow, rather than any powerful superhero endeavour that strengthens emotional resilience, as with the boys.

This study showed the difficulty in eliciting a critical gendered response as initially the girls were unquestioningly absorbing the culturally accepted messages to behave in a particular 'right' way, but as Foucault (2008) clarified, docility constrains autonomy. Extending Tesar *et al.*'s (2016:226) research on how stories can shape childhoods, I noted the danger of fairy tales being retold to inculcate in children the complexities of gendered behaviour in a restrictive manner, which can limit freedom of the imagination. The story messages in this study were effectively examined using a simple dialogic questioning approach to develop critical responses. This heroic tile highlights the hidden danger of cultural symbolism that children identify with, which although desired, may not promote democratic and peaceful outcomes.

5.3.3 Efferent and aesthetic symbolism tile

This symbolic tile will discuss how a mixture of efferent and aesthetic responses was evident in the boys', girls' and mixed discussion groups, and the effect of the group dynamics on the transactional relationships formed with the texts, as denoted by Rosenblatt (1978:35). In a boys' storytelling discussion, they began by focusing on the wonders of factual scientific-based elements of the story, as Dawkins (cited in Knapton, 2014) advocated. Their responses gradually became more animated

and imaginative as they moved along the efferent-aesthetic continuum as Rosenblatt (1978) contended:

B1: Did you know birds are actually dinosaurs? B2: No B1: Yes, birds are actually dinosaurs.	Efferent interest.
B3: Crocodiles are dinosaurs. BOYS: Yes.	Peer MKO.
R: I think you will find that most things have evolved from a long time ago.	Supporting efferent interest.
B4: When I went on the aeroplane holiday, I didn't like it when we landed because my ears got blocked.	Developing idea of flight.
R: That's right because of the change in air pressure.	
B5: To holiday when you are in Wales Euan would you like... It would take 24 miles to get there. B4: Then I had some sweets to unblock my ears. B6: I think in Japan. You have an aeroplane and you have to jump out of it I think.	Building geographical general knowledge. Childhood desire. Imaginative male adventure and risk-taking.
B4: Yes, you do. BOYS: You really have to. B3: Asher I bet you were really scared to do that. B6: I didn't do that. I just saw the film. B4: Me too.	Group interest. Admiration of courage. Media reference point. Media interest.

The convergence of fact and imaginative narratives in the boys' responses was indicative of the complexities of their lived worlds and their diverse interpretative lenses. As Butler (2010) debated, children's experiences of gender are not homogenous, even within a gender, endorsing Beauvoir's existentialist claim that gender is a becoming with no origin or ending. 'As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification' (op. cit.:45). I observed that in the discussion I gave mostly efferent responses to the boys' lived experiences, acting as a vehicle for biopower that is transmitted through the production of knowledge. This may have been due to my professional teaching background, where the pedagogical emphasis in schools is directed towards efferent answers due to the

hierarchical results-driven curricula demanding a didactic emphasis (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 2009; Layard, 2020). This study argues that child centred education needs to incorporate an aesthetic stance to enable children to interpret the world imaginatively. To determine how a critical gendered response can be elicited, children could be encouraged to propose alternative solutions by presenting 'what if' or pretend scenarios through storytelling discussions and activities.

Both the boys and girls were found to have a mutual interest in nature and the natural world, and equally processed the extraneous natural world aspects in stories. In a boys' *Molly Whuppie* story session, the props were seen to promote both efferent and aesthetic responses in their discussion and illustrations. By contrast, in a girls' group, I promoted aesthetic responses, for instance by the use of shiny pebbles as coloured jewels, to inspire the girls 'to imagine' and gain a deeper story understanding. The use of props showed the benefit of the pedagogy of choice, and the storyteller's creative use of different tools to scaffold children's learning, as Bruner (1990) proposed. Building upon Paley's (2005:91) premise, the study showed that once children begin to learn how to free their minds from rigid structured patterns, the potential to expand and visualise new and different viewpoints becomes possible. In the storytelling activity, one girl imaginatively extended the symbolic metaphorical meaning by describing how rubbing her pink ruby ring would take you to heaven and back (Fig. 5.24).



Fig. 5.24 A heavenly ruby ring (school C).

Visual narratives using symbolism are a valuable discourse which help children to respond to experience, as Bruner (1990) and Pullman (2017) discussed. In another girls' storytelling discussion, a girl gave an aesthetic response in metaphoric and naturalistic terms; she would feel as 'happy as a bird' if she received an award, and

this was captured in her drawing. She creatively described how as the bird flew, flowers grew underneath (Fig. 5.25).



Fig. 5.25 'Happy as a bird' (school B).

These metaphorical discourses liberate children to 'say' that which cannot be said easily through words alone, such as the depth of feeling in a loving relationship, which supports their mental well-being and feeling of eudaimonia. A further extension of this study would be to explore negative or unfamiliar feelings in this way, such as dejection and unhappiness, which would advance Fischer and Manstead's (2000) findings. As Coates and Coates (2016) suggested, by focusing on the cognitive developmental aspects rather than on the end product, the emotional expressionism associated with gender can then be explored.

In a girls' *Willow Pattern* storytelling activity, whilst a girl made her boat, she spontaneously burst into song, singing, 'I'm floating on the sea, I'm floating on the sea, eee-aye-tiddly-aye, I'm floating on the sea'. Another girl in the group asked if they could all sing the sea shanty song, forming a collective understanding of Chang and Knoog-se's experience of sailing in the boat, through the ethos of identity and community building. It is evident that literacy is socially situated, as Vygotsky (1978) observed, and that young children spontaneously engage in different modes and processes for meaning making through the strength of group

identification. Human communication comprises of these multiple modes and the storytelling discussions and activities provided the children with the opportunity to have a voice in their creation and to express transformative gendered meanings. It was evident how the girls' assertiveness and self-identity grew over the storytelling sessions, as Question 2 examined, and their multimodal contributions became more detailed and personal.

5.3.4 Emotional symbolism tile

I will consider in this tile the influence of social power on the expression of gendered emotions by examining the multimodal evidence from the discussions and activities concerning hard emotions, the suffocation of powerful emotions, forbidden expressions, misogyny and self-cultivation. These elements will be used to reflect upon the educative framework needed to help children broaden their identification of gendered emotions.

5.3.4.1 *Hard emotions*

In a boys' *Paper Bag Princess* discussion, there was evidence of gendered emotion identification, which shaped their interpretation of the altercation between the story characters. The Prince was perceived as the dominant authority figure and the princess as a subordinate character, despite being of a similar age. This was most likely due to the fact that he gets angry and demonstrative with the princess. The findings extended Fischer and Manstead's (2000:77-78) research on how Western socialisation of gender supports differences between the expression of emotions, and that without intervention boys readily identify with macho acts in characters, such as rapaciousness and toughness, to enhance their power and status. The boys were found to be learning that anger is the correct male emotional response whenever they felt vulnerable or threatened:

B1: Think the boy's the daddy and the girl's the child.	Production of knowledge of power.
B2: Yes, because the dad is really angry.	Bias against other (girls).
R: Oh, I see, is that what daddies do?	Surprise at strength of discipline towards other.
B2: Yes.	Uniformity.

Gilligan's (1982) research showed that boys can often become locked within their own anger, and without the opportunity to foster a healthy expression of this emotion, they can become the 'silent' emotional gender. This can lead to unfulfilling relationships and loneliness as it isolates boys and men, and can make it harder for them to develop meaningful and rewarding relationships. Furthermore, I argue it is likely that aggressiveness inhibits not only empathy, but has detrimental implications for their future mental well-being as well.

5.3.4.2 Suffocation of powerful emotions

Whilst boys learn to use anger effectively as a threat or to stay in control, this strong, powerful emotion can make girls or women feel out of control as they are used to suppressing both anger and frustration. By diminishing a girl's anger, her desires to be powerful, ambitious, self-directed, energetic and productive can all be suffocated. Thus, I investigated how the girls responded to the right to express anger, as the *Paper Bag Princess* opens the possibility to communicate both positive *and* negative emotions in male-female relationships:

R: ...clothes are burnt...Does she look like a princess now?	Truth regime of perfectionism.
GROUP: No. G1: She looks all angry.	Self-disciplinary practice. Undesirable feminine emotional expression.
R: And is she as glamorous as you would expect a princess?	Truth regime of biopower.
G2: No. G3: She doesn't look like a princess, because she's all angry and princesses are all happy.	Self-regulatory concepts. Deviant to social happiness norm.

In Martchenko's (1980) illustration (Fig. 6.3), Princess Elizabeth visually conveys male associated emotions, anger and hostility, subverting the patriarchal desire for a perfectly feminine, sweet and submissive image. However, rather than providing a liberating experience, girl G3's resistant response demonstrated a self-surveillance measure towards the princess's un-stereotypical unhappy portrayal. This study provided an opportunity to examine Foucault's production of docile bodies, and as Lyotard (1984) considered, to explore how children's active agency is measured in

terms of their subjective performativity, which can mask the operation of power by social control to maintain a patriarchal political order.

In determining “How can a critical gendered response be elicited in young children using fairy tales?”, my study has demonstrated the significance of the storytelling and cultural context. The girls were equally capable of expressing harder emotions such as anger, although they were not as comfortable doing so as the boys. Instead, the girls were shown to be developing a lack of self-worth and avoidance of confrontation. The findings build upon Gilligan’s (1982:xx) research and Foucault’s (1980) theory of biopower that self-image forms the basis of gendered moral judgements, and showed how the girls expressed a minimal amount of negative emotion. Their philosophical responses reflected their unconscious desire for unattainable perfect relationships whilst learning self-silencing. My research demonstrated that this cultural ideal, which is manifested in fairy tales, was upheld by parents and teachers as well. Walkerdine (1984) determined how hidden messages in many fairy tales teach girls the cultural restrictive trope that ‘any thought for self, any wanting, longing, desire or anger is bad’ (op. cit.:172). This often has a negative impact on female health and well-being and the establishment of genuine caring associations with themselves and others, which can lead to self-loathing, destructive behaviours and empty relationships. This has significant implications for the deliverance of the EY RSE programmes.

5.3.4.3 Forbidden expressions

Machoism discourages men from expressing softer emotions, such as love and sadness, and this study showed that the boys typically dismissed or referred to these feelings through the avenue of humour for fear of ostracization or ridicule by peers. I noted how the situation was already quite extreme even at this young age, with one boy silently expressing affection for his mother by creatively drawing her in a picture under the radar of his peers, whilst the girls openly expressed positive loving relationships with their mothers (Section 5.3.4.4). His action demonstrated the emotional relational deficit in the macho culture, and furthered Gilligan’s (1982) findings on boys’ withdrawal from desiring intimate relationships.



Fig. 5.26 A boy with his Mum (school C).

In the boy's picture (Fig. 5.26), he called upon his science fiction memory and loudly explained how eating his magic cake would turn you into a robot; whilst silently he also drew his mother. He did not mention drawing his mother due to the male pressure to be strong and detached. The cultural desire to be independent can later lead to emotional over-dependency on women or isolation (Gilligan, 1982). Similarly, in a mixed group, boy B1's rescuer response revealed the formation of an inner desired cultural narrative, as Vygotsky (1978) described, with his resolve to abandon everything in an attempt to find his mother. Although, he was cautious in front of his peers to do so and metaphorically stated his intention:

B1: I would put everything in a dustbin, and I might find her.	Traditional hero act: abandon everything to save the 'damsel in distress'.
B2: What happens if she had disappeared and she had got her mobile phone?	Taking ownership of the storyline.

Boy B2 critically considered the scenario and creatively drew upon a different reality-based possibility, demonstrating the benefit of fairy tales to help with problem-solving in stressful familial circumstances.

5.3.4.4 *Misogyny*

The boys' aesthetic responses revealed their sensitivity and emotional vulnerability to cruel caretakers. They collectively made jovial inter-textual references to Dahl's (1983) *The Witches*, and further verbally disfigured the Grand High Witch to emphasise the cultural symbolic association of evilness and ugliness in women. Their moralising responses extended Bruner's (1990:11) canonical form of images and Pullman's (2017) symbolic touchstones, through their knowledgeable production of gender identity bias and self-disciplinary power relations towards the 'other' gender. The children's pejorative responses were captured in their discussions and drawings:

R: ...You wicked children...	
B1: The grand high witch of doom [laughter]. She's got too much hair [laughs].	Older women viewed as ugly both by child and author.
G1: So, she's the wicked witch?	Identification of the misogynistic message: women are sinful.
B2: Let's have a look at the other one.	Learning about the negative categorisation of women.
B3: Cut off her ears.	Regulatory measure to deviant.
B4: She said the rabbit we need to tell them, kill them, kill them.	Metaphorical polarisation of the 'other'.
B1: I'm the wicked witch.	Identification of anti-social behaviour: social leniency to boys' behaviour over girls' deviancy.

Unusually, boy B1 identified with the 'bad' female character; only to assert his macho 'bad boy' image and realign his male performance to ensure his acceptance within his desired gendered group, furthering Giugni's (2006:97) research on children's negotiation of moral identities.



Fig. 5.27 The pointy finger of doom (school C).

The same boy drew a witch's *pointy finger of doom* (Fig. 5.27) and informed me of its powerful deathly connotations towards children. From this evidence it can be seen that he was exploring the darker emotional elements of fairy tales. He was open to learning about the difficult emotional challenges and familial characters that protagonists have to overcome and to defeat for their survival. Thus, the storytelling activity has shown one approach on how to elicit a critical gendered response in children, regarding their restrictive gendered beliefs and emotions, both verbally and non-verbally, and without sanitisation, as Weiss (2008) contemplated.

In fairy tales the protagonists are mostly young girls, whilst older women are viewed as inhibitors to their desires and personified as cruel in the guise of merciless stepmothers and wicked witches. Bound by these power-based performative limitations, most female characters play black or white roles (Butler, 1988). Wohlwend (2012) argued that the retelling of stories can thus perpetuate male advantage where women regard one another as adversaries. In a boys' *Donkeyskin* discussion group, boy B1 added a misogynistic and subversive twist to the role of the good fairy godmother whereby she acts out of jealousy and meanness rather than love and kindness, so forming strained familial relationships. His biased response is evidence of a cultural interpretation that views women negatively and with suspicion:

R: Can you think about who the fairy Godmother was? Who do you think the fairy looked like?	Critical reflection of gender bias: the godmother, the magical supporter of young motherless females versus unaided gifted young males.
B1: Like the fairy godmother from <i>Shrek</i> . In <i>Shrek 2</i> you had a fairy godmother and Shrek and the King, from Shrek's mum and dad and... and all they had was the King and Shrek. Shrek and the King made a whole badness and then Shrek's wife went into the room and then the fairy godmother in a bubble went into there and then she turned big. Then all of those bad things went into the room, and then the sofa started talking, and the wardrobe started talking, the bookshelf started talking, and the cupboard started talking.	Lack of identification with the 'other'.
R: And then...then what happened?	
B1: Then they didn't stop talking. They were alive and a puppy came and Shrek scared the puppy. That's all the fairy godmother's fault. But actually, she was a witch, because she was <i>bad</i> .	Rejection of female authority/support.

In contrast, in a girls' *Hansel and Gretel* group the girls promoted the value of female kinship, as reflected in their paper bag puppets and drawings that helped to create a positive social group dynamic. They imagined how they would feel if their mothers died and considered the possible aesthetic emotional and spiritual symbolic responses they would make:

G1: I would cry.	Soft emotion.
G2: I would be really sad and I would cry as much as a baby.	Association with vulnerability.
G3: I would give her flowers in her hands and cry.	Feminine symbolism.
G4: You would make a cross and put it where she died.	Spiritual symbolism.
G5: Would you put it in your house, because she might have died there.	Spectatorship. Empathy.

R: Would you not wonder what had happened to the mother?

G2: The father could have killed her.	Knowledge of domestic abuse.
G3: Or fainted.	Imagining the mother's surprise at their return instead.
G6: I wouldn't because my dad and Adam look after me.	Contemporary view of equality in parental responsibility.
G4: My mum is really nice. Pro-social feelings.	Feminine desire for 'niceness'.

This transcript demonstrated one method of how to elicit critical gendered responses, as evident with Girl G3's deconstruction of the gender value system. She perceptively considered the un-nurturing stepmother's reaction and how she would not have been pleased to see the children return. Girl G6 conjectured a pragmatic survival approach that there would still be another nurturing adult for her; her father. Her critical response demonstrated an alternative contemporary egalitarian stance to transcend the traditional hierarchical family structure, as Gilligan (1982:17) identified. Girl G6's unusual post-gender response may be a reflection of her own family circumstances, as Applebee (1978:15-16) proposed, and showed the value of group discussion in broadening experiences.

When making their paper bag puppets, the girls happily drew personal stories of themselves with their 'Mums', either beside them or holding one another's hands (Fig. 5.28), symbolically denoting that they loved their mothers. The heart symbol with its focus on their private personal worlds, reflected their cultural conditioning and symbolised how familial relationships were important to them (Butler, 1988). This conditioning was observed again in their cake drawings, which the girls drew for their mothers or best friends. This evidence presented the binary division of relationships, with cross-gender associations excluded.



Fig. 5.28 A paper bag puppet portraying female solidarity (school A).

Fairy tales often introduce children to universal aspects of family life and ethical ways of interaction. Jung (1915:69) proposed in his theory of critical consciousness that biological determinism explained the Electra complex, which can develop in girls who have been socialised in a patriarchal society. This involves psychosexual competition by a daughter with her mother for possession of the father, which later enables her to identify with the role of the same-sex parent. This developmental psychological phenomenon, combined with the father's traditional right to consider his daughter 'his property', creates a complex entangled tension in father-daughter dynamics, as witnessed in *Donkeyskin*.

In a girls' group, a girl recognised the dubiousness of the father's wish to marry his (step-) daughter. Surprisingly, most of the group were still accepting of the King's immoral desire and displayed minimal emotional resistance, as Gilligan (1982:22) advocated; this was possibly due to their submissive stance in the heterosexual matrix and the financial security marriage can bring them (Butler, 2010:xxxii). Similarly, Freeman (2018) reported on the societal disapproval that arose when Woody Allen married his stepdaughter, thirty-five years his junior, though perhaps the length of twenty years of marriage has given it the rubber stamp of liberal social acceptability. The girls in the *Molly Whuppie* discussion group seem to almost accept the daughters' beatings by the Ogre as a *fait accompli*, the father's divine ruling. This is familiar to them in their stage of development, which is often naturally

messy, unpredictable and sometimes violent. The storytelling discussion and activities provided an opportune time for children to understand the meaning of dysfunctional power relations and actions, by asking critical questions, such as 'why was he beating his daughters?'



Fig. 5.29 A strange 'somebody' (school C).

From my professional teaching background, I was conscious that although the children had been taught to be wary of strangers (Fig. 5.29): it was important for the girls (and boys) to be aware that abuse can happen in the family home. The RSE curriculum could be an appropriate place to discuss these issues.

5.3.4.5 *Self-cultivation*

Over the centuries, romantic relationships in fairy tales have been most often associated with the acculturation of girls. Gilligan (1982) reasoned that this is partly due to their identity being linked to relationships instead of professions. This prevailing ideology is reflected in a *Paper Bag Princess* illustration where the haughty prince is shown to be quite indifferent to her adoring gaze, much preferring sport as symbolised by the racket in his hand. In a mixed group, a girl puzzled over why the prince did not feel the same way as the princess. The canonical heart symbolism, as Bruner (1990) classified, is what captures the girl's attention rather than the mismatched relationship dynamics between the couple, and these were drawn in their pictures. The girls are knowledgeable about the contemporary romantic relationship association with the heart-shaped ideograph, which has patriarchal Judaeo-Christian origins. One girl's comment revealed how she was learning a gendered emotional understanding that boys are resistant to close intimate relationships, in contrast to girls who are culturally directed to be dependent upon them. This finding extended Applebee's (1978:41) and Favat's (1977)

spectator-participant studies on the impact of cognitive development on children's responses, and demonstrated that aesthetic transactions formed by reflection on prior, life-lived experiences enable philosophical thought about the nature of male-female power relationships. As Lyotard (1984) argued, with the development of self-awareness, self-worth and the pride that comes with independence and decision-making power, the desire for girls to become passive, indolent and dependent souls called 'princesses' becomes far less appealing. A mixed *Paper Bag Princess* storytelling discussion challenged the children's limited preconceptions and cultural desire for traditional heteronormative relationships. One girl displayed Isbell *et al.*'s (2004) critical listening and through suspending cultural expectations towards the characters, she was able to comprehend how emotions can overrule reason. Her knowledgeable response repositioned her as a Vygotskian MKO that influenced another girl's relational understanding, but not the boy's perception. He remained stereotypically distant.

Similarly, in a mixed storytelling group, the boys and girls expressed different interpretations of the body language between Prince Ronald and Princess Elizabeth:

R: Does Ronald like Elizabeth, how can you tell?	
B1: You can tell she doesn't love him because he hasn't got hearts around him.	Male biased interpretation.
G1: Because he doesn't love her – because he hasn't got love hearts.	Correct interpretation. MKO.
B2: I know why, because Elizabeth has hearts around her and she wants to kiss him. [Laughter].	Sexual understanding of love.
R: There is something else – how is he standing?	
B2: Straight.	Unemotional physical interpretation.
R: Is he standing towards her?	
G's and B's: No.	
R: Where is he looking?	MKO.

B2: He is looking this way.

Literal interpretation of outlook.

R: He is looking the other way from her, isn't he?

This conversation about gender relations illustrates another approach on how to elicit critical gendered responses. Boy B1's interpretation extended Pullman's (2017) meaning of touchstones by revealing a cultural understanding of the heart symbol in terms of loving, although with a negative judgement towards Princess Elizabeth. Girl G1's understanding reflected that of the illustrator: Prince Ronald was not the one overwhelmed with loving desire. As Fischer and Manstead (2000) found, this may be due to the fact that it is acceptable for girls to exhibit softer, caring and affectionate emotions towards babies and young children. Due to cultural self-discipline, as recognised by Foucault (1980), this can lead to the regulation of women's bodies. This indirectly reinforces bodily objectification, which can allow external regulation and raises the cultural issue of the woman's right to control their own reproductive function. Female resistance is thus power disguised in Foucauldian terms and only through critical awareness can hegemonic gendered power structures be changed and transformed.

The girls' knowledgeable emotional responses enhance the findings of Steedman's (1982) inner storytelling study on three 8-year-old girls' creative writing about their lives and their use of heart symbolism. She stated, 'The particular advantage of the fairy-tale is that it provides an *abstract* mirroring of a child's real circumstances. Set out of real time it makes easily manipulable the symbols it presents' (op. cit.:141). All the stories' gendered messages and ideas can be made visible, both those overt and covert. Boys, on the other hand, were and are being raised to be more emotionally guarded and distant, and consequently become closed and unreceptive to emotions and body language (Gilligan, 1982). Hence, as Biddulph (2018:13) claimed, boys' development of social skills and emotional awareness is more prolonged than girls, and they need more help. Boy B2 humorously interpreted Princess Elizabeth's doting affection towards Prince Ronald, and by imaginatively living-through her experience he was able to express a rare cross-gender romantic desire. He achieved this by subverting heteronormative acts, which allowed him to express his own desire for physical affection in a more direct way. This finding extended Mendelsohn *et al.*'s (2018) study, and demonstrates that critical

discussion of gendered power relationships in children's stories can support freedom of thought and test the extremity of their emotions.

The boys' vulnerability was considered in relation to their idolisation of macho role models; they were notably more critical of female caretakers and assertive about behavioural moral boundaries. 'The lived through' imaginative experience that the fairy tales provide, I argue, is an essential enabler for the emotional development of children's self-worth and for forming fulfilled, rounded and equitable relationships.

5.3.5 Summary

When investigating how to elicit a critical gendered response, Question 2 examined the symbolic cultural influences that actively engaged children, from which four Mosaic themed tiles were identified (Fig. 5.30): hierarchical symbolism, heroic symbolism, efferent and aesthetic symbolism and emotional symbolism.

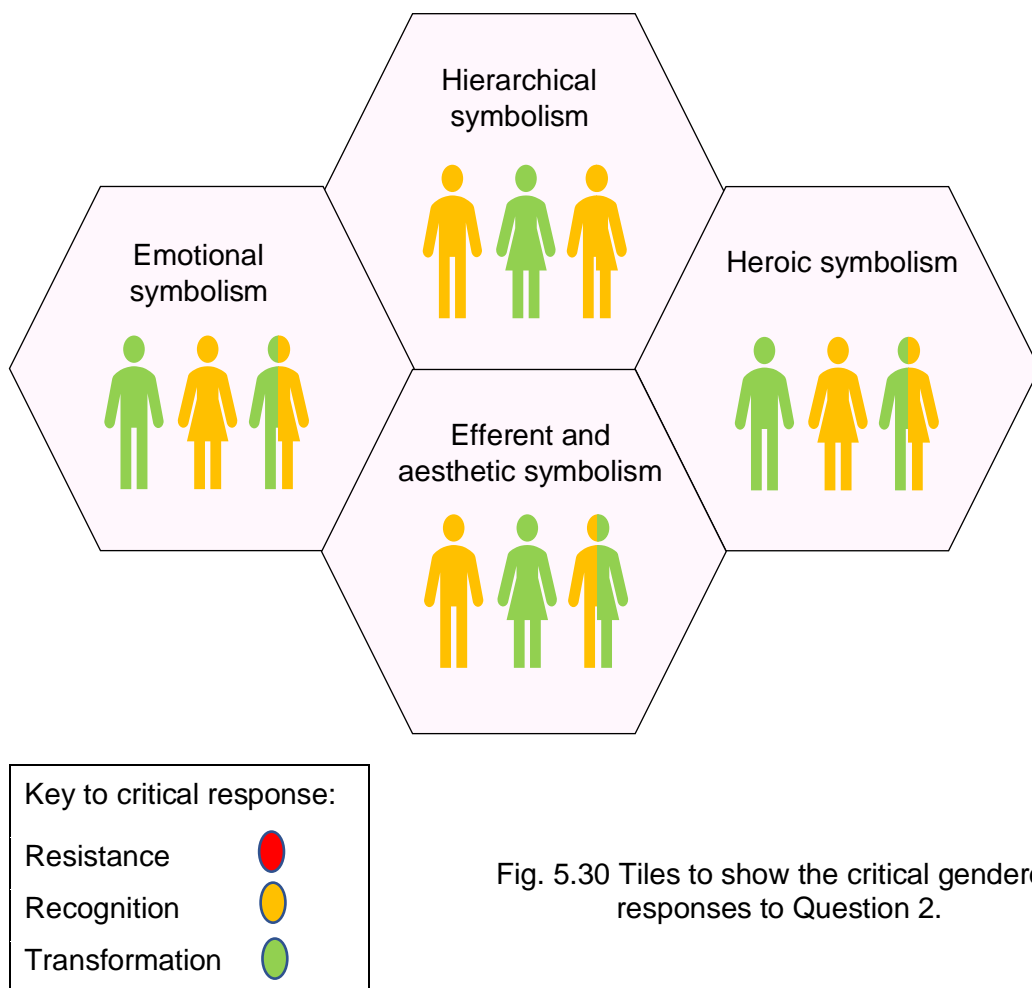


Fig. 5.30 Tiles to show the critical gendered responses to Question 2.

Hierarchical symbolism: Extending Abdelmoneim's findings (Hoyle, 2017), the boys' expansive use of language highlighted the benefit of positive strong affirmations for self-worth, which the girls' diminishing language greatly reduced. These results suggest that children can be supported in connecting with alternative positive perceptions of themselves not only through critical questioning and discussions, but by changing the emphasis on the use of language. For instance, changing the symbolic image of Gretel by thinking of her as 'super strong', bolder and more assertive language was drawn upon, which challenged deprecating and lessened submissive perceptions. This is significant, as Pullman (2017) emphasised, when discussing the significance of metaphorical touchstones and their power to shape gendered meanings and messages, which children unquestioningly absorb unless taught to critically confront. The results strongly indicate that consideration of the symbolic imagery to develop respect and parity between the genders can potentially support a gender-neutral approach rather than one with a covert hierarchical bias. Notably, the children were found to be associating performative acts with a specific gender, and the philosophical discussions enabled these cultural perceptions to be challenged (Butler, 1988).

Heroic symbolism: The boys discerned and creatively expanded upon superhero macho symbolism and language with great enthusiasm and knowledge (Foucault, 1980; Munson *et al.*, 2015), whilst peaceful alternatives need to be equally encouraged. The heroic discourse was found to valuably build the boys' resistance to self-deprecation, whereas this was found to be limited with the girls. The children's moral discourse was greatly influenced by the desire to belong to a gendered group (Giugni, 2006); critical responses effectively challenging gender favouritism (Robnett and Susskind, 2010). In a mixed group, one girl illustrated a sword, and as Butler (2010) argued, such acts are important in developing the ability to overcome heteronormative positioning and establishing personal agency.

Efferent and aesthetic symbolism: The story discussions indicated how the girls were learning to free themselves from oppressive cultural symbolism and expectations (Rousseau, 2012). These discussions enabled them to create new and different insights and meanings, as Paley (1990) advocated. Through the exploration of metaphorical expressions, the formation of emotional cultural docility was most evident amongst the boys, which argues for the necessity of providing a wider variety storytelling experiences to support higher cognitive and broader holistic understandings (Vygotsky, 1978; Coates and Coates, 2016).

Emotional symbolism: Anger and love were found to be the significant emotions that the genders responded to differently, having a major impact on their ability to form fulfilling equitable relationships, to take self-disciplinary measures and to enact emotional behaviours (Gilligan, 1982). I argue that boys can learn to empathise with softer emotions when encountered in a story, although this depends on the group dynamic and discussions held. The discussion of cultural metaphorical symbolism, as identified by Bruner (1990) and Pullman (2017), was found to be emotionally liberating for boys, conversely the girls were resistant to examining these darker, disquieting emotions. Early childhood RSE needs to share stories, enabling children to express and test the extremity of all their emotions.

5.4 Question 3: How did the children critically respond to alternative gendered role models and acts?

From the critical discourse and activities four main tiles arose to answer the question: perfect body acts (5.4.1), alternative heroic acts (5.4.2), real Mother acts (5.4.4) and caring Father acts (5.4.5).

5.4.1 Perfect body acts tile

In this tile I will investigate how the importance placed on the visual appearances of protagonists is a product of biopower, which can result in a negative moral discourse and destructive self-disciplinary practices if left unchallenged. I will explore if the children are adopting or resisting these measures, and the need for resilience to counter the pressure of conformity, especially if categorised as the 'other'.

Following Butler's (2006) concept of acts of gendered performativity, I argue that the bodily and nonverbal discourses of gender are unbalanced and present a patriarchal and traditional view of the world with unequal gendered power distributions. Children's familiarity with these cultural stereotypes often means that they take them to be true and are reluctant to perceive an alternative or opposing stance. Foucault (1980) explored the historical emergence of biopower as the dominant means of social control in terms of the interplay between power and resistance. Due to the overturning of the eighteenth-century repressive control of sexuality in the twentieth century, the cultural power re-emerged with a focus on the sexual body (Foucault, 1995). When power meets resistance, it re-establishes itself with a different expression, in this instance as control by the desire for everyone to

achieve the perfect self. This is achieved through self-disciplinary practices, such as physical fitness and weight watching, as Wells (2015) reported. The ideology of fit, thin and healthy bodies has become embedded within our gender discourses, with a power differential that can lead to moral overtones that persuade people to regard unfit and fat bodies as deviants. Equally no fairy tale is innocent of ideological implications, and the bearing of the story will be dependent on its positioning within a culture. Stephens (1992) pointed out, 'ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language' (op. cit.:8). Whether the story seeks to naturalise or challenge the social power implications, it is in the reader's power to co-construct alternative gender interpretations.



Fig. 5.31 Red with a takeaway meal.

I used Goldstein's (2008) photograph, *Red* (Fig. 5.31), as a comparison to the illustration of the *Paper Bag Princess* (Fig. 5.32) to encourage critical gendered responses to heteronormative idealised physical images. Goldstein (2008) choreographed the colours and textures in her composition of *Red* to match those in Disney's portrayal of fairy tale scenes.

A boys' discussion group revealed that due to the growing cultural desire for a perfect appearance, overweight boys and girls can be punished by becoming the butt of cruel jokes. This virtuous moral perception can serve to undervalue a person's intelligence and physical abilities; overweight girls can suffer from lowered self-esteem as early as age 5. The social ideology of individual responsibility for health has created the superior moral belief in a personal obligation to maintain

good body shape and fitness. Boy B4 denigrates Red's appearance by calling her a 'greedy pig', in so doing classifying her as disreputable, lazy and inferior:

R: This is a picture of Little Red Riding Hood.	Alternative perception to small, powerless girl.
B1: No, it's not, she looks fat.	Abuse. Biopower.
B2: She has a fat tummy.	Performance.
B3: She eats too much and drinks too much.	Moral judgement; she is failing in her responsibility to be healthy.
R: Would you still like to be friends with her?	Consideration of inner virtues.
B4: She's a greedy pig, because she's really fat.	Abusive animal terms.
B5: Because she is a girl.	Misogyny.
R: If she was slim would you still be friends with her?	Cross-gender friendships.
B6: No because she is a girl, and I'm a boy.	Marginalisation. Polarisation of gender.
B2: Because she looks all scruffy	Rejection of non-conformative behaviour.

It was evident that the boys were adopting a strong patriarchal regime of bodily government towards alternative physical performances of women. This subordination of groups with characteristics outside of bodily perfection restricts self-expression and individual freedom, as Rousseau (2012) recognised. Foucault (1995) argued that power produces the docile bodies that society requires; however, it can be argued that this is not necessarily a negative outcome as it can be energising and empowering. The challenge is the extent to which this is performed and governed.

The children in a mixed *Paper Bag Princess* group critically assessed *Red's* alternative 'drag' appearance, as Butler (2010:187) stated, against the traditional cultural memory of stylised feminine performativity they shared. Supporting Hain's (2014) research, it was apparent that they placed an emphasis on external signs, such as colour and clothes, in forming their understanding of gender:

R: How is she different?	Philosophy of difference.
B1: Because she is just dressed up.	Impersonator of traditional <i>Red Cap</i> . Because: a critical response.
G1: Because she is not really Red Riding Hood.	Authenticity of character.
R: What would she need to do to look more like <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>?	Discussion on transformation.
G2: She needs to be more red.	Colour.
B2: No wolf is there.	The antagonist – male anti-hero.
B3: And she needs to be smaller.	Less value. Aware of power relations.
G2: Because she is not wearing the same shoes as in the <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i> story. And, she needs to have red shoes.	Conformity to idealised appearance.
G1: Because she has little spots and they look like melamine.	Responsibility for personal health.
B1: Little Red Riding Hood's shoes are yellow, only swimming shoes can be any colour.	Colour. Subjective stylised performances. Conformity to social norm.
B2: And it has to have a wolf in there.	Heroic desire. From the seventeenth century, two dangers were joined in the symbolism of the wolf: an imaginative predator, such as a werewolf, and a greedy male in society.

Boy B2 emphasised his desire for the elements of fear and heroism, the possible confrontation of the child and an opponent, the 'bad' father figure in disguise. Kristeva (1980) discussed how fairy tales contain familial power relations and are a valuable means for children to imaginatively address unbalanced gendered disparities. There was a collective association of Red Riding Hood's appearance,

although none of the traditional pictures ever depict her dressed fully in red, just her cloak that Perrault (1697) added in *Le Petit Chaperon*. It was evident from the normalisation of the ‘expected’ dress code practice that any gender nonconformity can lead to marginalisation, as Foucault (1995) warned. His theory was mainly concerned with the critique of social relations rather than the construction of ‘other’s’ voices, precluding the potential action necessary for social change. His theory could be regarded as reinforcing the relations of domination by condemning those who been marginalised to remain at the margins. Rowe (2005) highlighted the political risk associated in identifying as ‘the other’, and whether the labelling could be addressed by considering comparable characteristics. The fairy tale discussions showed the potential of enabling children to become emotionally resilient to oppressive pressures and stereotypes no matter how bad they are; they do so by liberating the imagination (Tatar, 1992; Phillips, 2011; Williams, 2014). The children’s bias towards patriarchal desires of gendered appearance were challenged in the *Paper Bag Princess* and *Donkeyskin* role-play activities. It will now be shown how these performances can inspire critical responses to the artificiality of heteronormative appearances and the value of inner virtue as reflected in eudaimonia.

5.4.1.1 *Pressure of conformity: ‘I have beauty, but I am not my looks’*

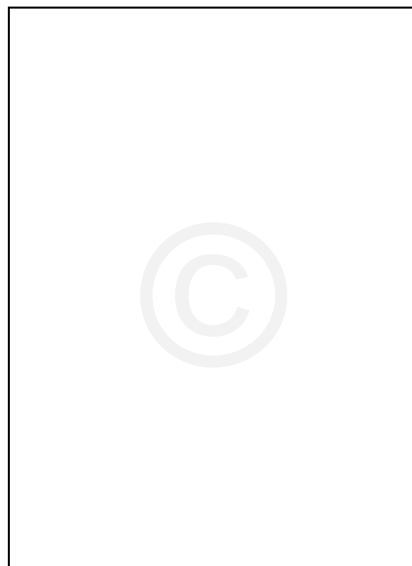


Fig. 5.32 Princess Elizabeth in a brown paper bag.

The *Paper Bag Princess* role play intervention with extra-large paper bags encouraged the children to consider the superficiality of outer appearances and the

importance of inner qualities (Fig 5.32). It was evident that stories provided a conceptual framework for thinking for meaning, as the girls regarded wearing the paper bag as a negative transformative experience for the princess. Girl G2 demonstrated the power of the sociopolitical influence and the desire for bodily perfectionism through her self-surveillant response (Foucault, 1980):

R: Does she look so beautiful now in a paper bag?	[Role play with girl in a large paper bag.]
GIRLS: No [unanimously].	Moral judgement.
G1: In a paper bag – it's all baggy.	Non-conformist.
G2: If you dressed up in a paper bag to school you would be called a silly chump by your mother!	External sociopolitical conditioning.
G3: In the end does the prince marry the princess?	Lack of agency due to self-creation of docile body.
G4: I don't think it matters but I don't mind if my hair is yucky. Some of my friends like my hair, but when it's messy you don't and I just leave my hair dirty.	Rejection of patriarchal ruling. Individual agency.

The role play showed how critical gendered responses could be engaged about the consequences of the princess's subversive stance to solicit the prince's heart and win him back from the other female (dragon). The girls philosophically speculated on the self-regulatory practice that creates Foucauldian docile bodies by reflecting upon the less than perfect image. As Steedman (1982) wrote, 'The verbal celebration of infantile femininity is part of the historical legacy that little girls in modern society have to operate under' (op. cit.:62). Their conclusion reflected a misogynistic stance, that the prince was right in being cross with her dishevelled appearance, supporting Davies' (1989:63-72) findings of young children's unresponsiveness to gender equality concepts.

Davies (1989:69) claimed that due to the boys' pre-existing understanding of the structure of the cultural gender narrative, they anticipated Elizabeth's action to demonstrate her goodness and virtue. The boys believed it was totally within Ronald's rights to correct her due to their moral self-disciplining discourse originating from the production of cultural discriminating knowledge (Foucault, 1995). Similarly, as a result of the girls' indiscriminate obedience to the subtext of

traditional romantic plots, they blamed Elizabeth for the state she ended up in. Davies' (1989) analysis revealed children's steadfast maintenance of the male-female dichotomy, even when so young, which they accomplished through 'ignoring individual deviations, or managing to construe those deviations as somehow fitting into the bipolar system' (op. cit.:19). She termed these activities as 'category maintenance work', and noted how most of the children in her study were closed to the emancipatory messages of the story. Davies (1989) argued that their unreceptiveness was due to their adherence to a moral hierarchy organised around firm gendered expectations of the male and female, dominant and subordinate roles. Girl G3's passive response extended Steedman's (1982) study, resolving the gender dilemma by recourse to the propriety of romantic love and hegemonic relations. Even though I explained that the person inside would be the same, despite the outward transformation from riches to rags rather than the traditional rags to riches story, many were not convinced.

In a mixed group, the children maintained throughout the story session that gendered conformity was necessary for acceptability both within peer groups and in society generally due to compulsory heteronormativity, as Butler (1988) reasoned: however, with the use of their imaginations they began to explore the possibility of individualism. The transcript findings enhanced Bruner's (1985) notion that storytelling can support the transfer and amalgamation of children's personal experiences of understanding into a public culturally negotiated form of consciousness. Critical reflection enabled the components of individualism to be identified, such as uniqueness, self-responsibility and autonomy. A boy's reflective comment on differential belonging illustrated his emerging critical understanding: 'I would say be normal...because otherwise you get mixed up with swimming and you wouldn't go swimming when you're supposed to'. As Butler (1988) stressed, this is necessary when challenging the structural stasis of the heterosexualising norms, which are themselves unstable and hence flexible. Fairy tale discussions can provide a rich context for the co-creation of emancipatory genderless roles and new comprehension, but as the study indicates, discussion time is needed for this to be successfully achieved. Blaise (2013:808) highlighted the need to rethink the EY classroom, not as fixed but malleable, dynamic and multifunctional, to facilitate the movement of ideas and concepts and the process of change. I will discuss more about rethinking the EY classroom to promote gender-neutrality in Chapter 7.5.2.

Later in a boys' *Donkeyskin* storytelling discussion, I asked them to consider how the act of getting under the animal's skin to alter one's appearance influences how you are treated by others. This enabled reflection upon how performative acts are scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies, particularly within anatomical and sexual discourses. This is an important aspect concerning the regulation of 'normal' childhoods through their state of innocence. The discussion revealed the moral discourse based upon the spectre of 'shame', which Butler (1988) declared is the societal stance to direct and enforce coherent gender identification that often absorbs and displaces sex:

R: What do you think about the Princess choosing to wear a Donkey skin?	
B1: To keep her alive and to make her smelly, it did smell.	Multisensory experience.
B2: Because it made her look like a goose.	Disciplinary discourse measure to those who deviated from norm.
R: That's right to disguise her...	
B1: I don't know.	Comment to encourage a less black and white interpretation.
B2: 'Cause, she would look naked and rude otherwise.	Shameful judgement.
B3: Because she had nothing to wear.	Avoids sexual element.
R: That's right it would disguise her and make her look...	
B4: Pretty...	Upholds 'childhood' innocent discourse and does not engage with physiological aspect.
R: Are you sure...	
B5: Ugly.	Patriarchal dominant expectation. Conception of normality.
R: Do you think your looks are important if you are a princess?	
	Deviant performance.
	Challenging the desire for bodily perfection.

BOYS: No/Yes.	Boys' uncertainty reflects cultural tension on quest for physical perfection.
R: Can you tell me why you think no?	
B2: Because her dress might rip.	Practical risk assessment.

My guarded response, based on the ideology of 'one true childhood', was equally limiting, as Tesar *et al.* (2016) noted. Far from eliciting a critical gendered response towards the regulations and boundaries surrounding Foucault's manipulative biopower, my response had the effect of closing down discussion. Boy B2's higher cognitive response drew upon practical gender-neutral concerns rather than a desire for feminine aesthetic perfectionism. He clearly resisted the 'male gaze' position that is often reflected in stories, as Favilli and Cavallo (cited in Saner, 2017) argued, where boys are taught to value girls simply for their beauty instead of their activism.

In a mixed *Hansel and Gretel* storytelling group, the girls were perplexed about Hansel's old, dull, pastel-coloured clothes in the illustrations, in contrast to the vibrant and vivid colours of today (Hains, 2014). Lyotard (1984:42-53) commented on how children are gauged by their gendered performance, which contributes to polarisation and gender-policing. Similarly, Hansel's *National Health* pink ringed-spectacles jarred with the girls' culturally prescribed expectations of gendered performance, as their comments about his glasses and the witch's black framed, pink-tinted ones showed:

G1: He's got pink glasses on.	Recognition with glasses symbolism.
G2: Those trees have faces.	Visual interpretation.
G3: There's a girl that has red stuff on it. Her coat like Little Red Riding Hood, oh dear...	Higher cognitive analysis of story symbolism.
G1: ...The witch wearing pinkish glasses too.	Identification of gender and inter-generational familial similarity.
G2: Big eyes and a hole that like mouth.	Visual interpretation of shapes and configurations.

B1: I think it looks like a werewolf.

Imaginative extension to female parent figure - threatening male parent figure. Common with boys.

The illustrations of the two rounded pairs of glasses presented a 'family' juxtaposition between a grandson (Hansel) and a grandmother (the witch), blurring gender and intergenerational divides. One boy's picture showed the detailed observation he had made of the witch's glasses (Fig. 5.33).



Fig. 5.33 Glasses symbolising perceptive insight (school B).

Browne's (2008) illustrations of Hansel and the witch with glasses prompted the children to look at them from different angles, and to identify the similarities between the genders rather than the differences. Through the visual discourse and understanding of canonical symbolism and touchstones, as recognised by Bruner (1990) and Pullman (2017), higher cognitive thought was achieved (Vygotsky, 1978). Children's authors have often used glasses to symbolise eye openers in fairy tales; representing a character's open-mindedness and their problem-solving skills due to their ability to see different perspectives, such as J.K. Rowling's (1997) Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone* and William Golding's (1954) Piggy in *Lord of the Flies*. To acquire imaginative knowledge is to acquire the capacity to transcend the actual world and to enter the realm of possibilities using

gaps or anomalies, as Lser (1980:111) established. The children creatively responded to the storytelling symbolism about further insights and perceptions. One girl symbolically drew a witch with two different coloured eyes (Fig. 5.34), and said that she was frightened by how they just stared at you.



Fig. 5.34 A witch with different coloured eyes (school C).

From the critical discussions on appearances, social biopower and disciplinary power is evident in the children's desire for the perfect body and gendered appearance. Only by challenging structural hierarchy and rules, as Butler (2010) advocated, can the danger of 'victim blaming' be counterbalanced. This can arise from a Foucauldian perspective that everyone has equal opportunity and engagement with the production of sociopolitical power.

5.4.2 Alternative heroic acts tile

I will examine in this tile the children's responses to the female protagonists' alternative acts that are traditionally associated with male heroism, such as those of adventurer, rescuer, benefactor, and intelligent trickster. I will discuss the difficulty of overcoming culturally desired acts due to biopower, and the necessity of critical discussions if change and transformation of prejudiced perceptions are to be achieved.

5.4.2.1 *Adventurer act*

In the fairy tales chosen, the leading characters are stereotypically bold, strong and independent, but perform un-stereotypically female acts. The masculine traits

awarded to them metaphorically symbolise that women are not to be considered inferior, but have skills and abilities equal to those of men. The combination of the characterisation of both masculinity and femininity within the female protagonist can thereby form the basis of an alternative pedagogical strategy to re-construct multiple gendered identities. Paley (1990:91) believed that group storytelling and role play provide a valuable platform for imaginatively exploring different characters. In this section I further this research and investigate children's critical responses to the princess's portrayal of alternative roles, such as adventurers.

To be adventurous and outwardly focused develops confidence and self-awareness, so I investigated the children's desire for adventure. Surprisingly, it was in a girls' *Willow Pattern* storytelling session where a girl drew upon her actual real-life tree climbing adventures and experience. As Bruner (1990:20) noted, the cultural manipulation of symbolism is significant in shaping our thoughts and the language used to express them. The girl established a meaningful transactional relationship between the story and her own life experiences that helped her contextualise from what was known to what was unknown and to begin to form cross-cultural gendered knowledge, as Applebee (1978:15-16) and Favat (1977:39-43) recognised. The same girl imagined that when anyone ate her cake it would magically transport them to a park, reflecting her enjoyment of physical adventure and fun, resisting oppressive cultural pressure to conform to placidity and docility. I found that it was in the single-sex groups that the girls explored their more adventurous spirit and this occurred in both the story discussions and activities.

Tatar (1992:111-112) stated that in fairy tales, female curiosity 'castigates the death principle' whereas male curiosity is a cause for celebration due to its liberating and life-giving force. In a *Donkeyskin* girls' group, this oppressive bio-political message, as Foucault (1980) categorised, revealed its power to block resistance when the girls struggled to recall any heroines who had been adventurous risk-takers like the Prince, creeping up and exploring the Princess's animal living quarters. This was evident when the girls recalled their story memory of the popular Disney princess prototype, *Rapunzel*, as reflected in many of their drawings and even paper bag hand puppets.

A girl's *Rapunzel* paper bag hand puppet (Fig. 5.35) showed how she was learning the cultural preference for slenderness and the ideal feminine shape, resisting alternative body figures, as Harriger *et al.* (2019) found. Interestingly, the princess

puppet was drawn by the same girl who had shared her tree climbing adventures. This finding revealed how girls are absorbing conflicting cultural messages and learning how to balance them, such as achieving female freedom whilst being beautiful at the same time. Similarly, De Beauvoir described how this inner conflict lead to the tragic death of her friend at twenty-two years old: 'She died of an illness but the illness was a result of all the contradictions and all the ties she had to face' (Sage, 2020:3). Foucault (1995) explained that the inter-play of power and resistance can create this inner tension; the girl asserting herself by being adventurous and thereby challenging male authoritarian power. However, rather than resistance, her drawing is evidence of male authoritarian power reasserting itself through the ideals of femininity that render women docile. These discussions highlight the conflicting social boundaries and the need to protect children's well-being and welfare in the early years.



Fig. 5.35 A Rapunzel paper bag hand puppet (school C).

In a mixed group, a girl expressed strong identification with the traditional positioning of women and resisted a progressive gendered approach, furthering Butler's (1988:522) discussion on the artificiality of gender construction and performativity. A boy was seen to demonstrate understanding towards the feminist neutralising gendered power implications, and judiciously reinforced the patriarchal status quo: 'I will punish girls'. The girls' passive responses showed that they were unaccustomed to think in non-gendered terms that embraced both the ethics of fairness and equality and ethics of care as denoted by Gilligan (1982); this was

possibly due to the girls' home orientated positioning and the reward gained by this arrangement. A girl's statement, 'I would never...' demonstrated that children are not passive subjects of their socialisation, but active and thoughtful participants in the process as Vygotsky (1978) claimed. Her resistance built on Steedman's (1982:31) research on how children's shared narratives and interpretations contribute towards the knowledge of the dispersal of power, agency and self-disciplinary practices.

5.4.2.2 *Rescuer act*

The patriarchal mantra 'boys are superior to girls' is based largely on the historical economic advantage men have over women, something they wish to protect (Saini, 2017). In a boys' *Paper Bag Princess* storytelling group, one boy critically reasoned his objection to the heroic actions of the princess to save the prince on grounds of cultural gendered dominance. This desire enforces social power and the creation of docile bodies, as Foucault (1995) determined, rather than autonomous individuals:

R: Would you be pleased if a girl saved you?

B: No, because you would be too angry and if they were doing a joke you would be angry.

In *Molly Whuppie*, Molly is unassuming, but brave, and as a result of her heroic, self-sacrificial endeavours she manages to save her sisters and herself. During a boys' discussion, there was a rare gender-role reversal due to the emphasis on 'male' heroic acts, although as noted earlier, quickly retracted; this is the benefit of open exploratory talk to experiment with alternative progressive concepts. The critical discourse broadened Wells' (2009:216) study on choosing challenging stories that help children 'to create possible or imaginary worlds through words – by representing experience in symbols that are independent of the objects, events and relationships symbolised' (op. cit.:176). It was evident that boys' critical understanding of language and symbolism was scaffolded by my dialogic questioning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983). The power of patriarchy was evident through the boys' resistance to alternative equal positioning; patriarchal power conceals itself by making gender equality seem socially constraining, whilst inequality and belligerent dominance seem positive and desirable. As Foucault (1980) argued, power is productive and operates through discourses, interactions

and norms that form part of our everyday lives by constructing particular knowledge and desire.

In a mixed *Hansel and Gretel* group storytelling, the boys again struggled with feminine agency, and resisted the concept of the boy as trapped and dependent on being saved by a girl. A boy resolved the predicament by emphasising the storyline that Gretel should be *pushed* into the oven, thereby subverting the fairy tale's egalitarian message to support the dominant male heteronormative position. Another boy imaginatively made a text-to-media connection by drawing upon his memory of a TV make-believe character, the cookie monster, to further resist the subversive theme (Fig. 5.36). His creative response illustrated Applebee's (1978:44) finding of the social productive process that occurs again and again: 'the world of story is fully assimilated into the child's general view of the world, made sense of on the child's own terms'.



Fig. 5.36 The cookie monsters surrounding Hansel's cage (school B).

In a girls' group, one girl pondered why it was not the boy who pushed the witch into the oven. The reason she wondered about this may have been due to the fact that she was more familiar with male-centred action narratives, as McLeod (2011) and Favilli and Cavallo (cited in Saner, 2017) discovered. At the end of the discussion, another girl gave an emancipatory declaration that her mum was strong, indicating a higher cognitive understanding of individual agency. Her critical response showed

the potential of storytelling for transformative thought to overcome feminine docility. Similarly, in a *Zog* storytelling discussion, a girl stated that she would like to be a rescuer princess, ‘a *nice* one who is able to rescue people’. Her liberating idea reflected how she was learning to imaginatively adapt her feminine schema with gender-neutral heroic acts.

Foucault (1980) recognised that social power produces specific gendered knowledge and the desire for conformity, as was evident in a girls’ *Molly Whuppie* storytelling group in their preference to be one of the sisters rather than action girl Molly. As Rousseau (2012) warned, they were learning to sustain their own self-oppression and thereby to limit their dynamism:

R: Would you have liked to have been Molly?	
G1: Was she a princess?	Cultural desire.
R: Yes, once she had married the Prince.	
G1: No way!	
G2: I would have liked to have been one of the persons who marries.	Power of patriarchal heteronormativity.
R: To have been the prince?	
G2: The princess! I would have liked to be a princess.	Resistance to alternative positioning.
R: Oh, you would have liked to be one of the sisters?	
GIRLS: The sister [chorus].	
G3: I would have liked to have been one of the sisters with the gold necklace.	Awareness of social reward for docility.
G4: I would like to have a golden necklace too.	

The girls’ docile responses demonstrate their internalisation of the cultural fairy tale rhetoric whereby female passivity is rewarded with materialist treasures, symbolising higher social status and wealth. Understandably, from their cultural knowledge they believed that the change they desire in life will only come about if they perform their gender role properly. I raise the question of whether girls would be able to achieve their desired happily-ever-after ending in a throwaway culture perpetuating disposable relationships. Encouraging an awareness of personal autonomy is essential for girls to define and reach their life goals. The girls would

have preferred to passively accept rather than confront the traditional cultural behavioural expectations and ideologies, as Butler (2010) promoted; to be the 'waiters' instead of heroic rescuers or independent achievers. My researcher intervention encouraged the girls to philosophically consider how to become agentic and assertive, to exercise their right to isegoria and be valued as equal participants in decision making. The right to be involved in matters that concern them is decreed by the UNCRC (1989), Article 12, to promote freedom of speech and equality.

5.4.2.3 *Benefactor act*

European storytelling culture, as Simmons (2010) commented, often values 'nice' over 'real' and limits girls' space to have a voice and to achieve their whole potential. The word 'nice' originates from Latin and French, meaning stupid or ignorant. Being nice is a heteronormative learned cultural behaviour and is not something that comes naturally to girls. This study indicated that contrary to Foucauldian theory, social norms are not equally adhered to by all, creating the possibility of an understanding of the diversity of acts possible within a gender. *Molly Whuppie* resists the 'nice' role with an alternative cross-gendered moral position, encouraging children to develop philosophical and realistic perspectives of behavioural motivations about a particular deed. Extending the findings of *Lifting Limits* (2018) on the moral acts associated with gender, the following dialogic discussion provided the opportunity to encourage a critical gendered response. The findings show that norms of behaviour can lead to a lack of empathy and compassion which are needed for healthy relationships:

R: What did you think about Molly? Do you think what she did was nice?	
G1: I don't know.	Unfamiliar with alternative gendered acts.
G2: She was very mean, 'cause she took all the Ogre's stuff.	Critical understanding.
R: Can you think about the reason she was taking the Ogre's stuff?	
G3: Because she was very mean.	Self-surveillance.
G4: So, she could marry the prince.	Higher cognitive thought.
G3: ...and the Ogre was mean to do it.	Realistic perception.

G5: Why did she really need the ring?	Higher cognitive thought – meaning of action
R: Maybe the king was testing her to see if she was going to be good enough to marry his son? Do you think it was a test for Molly?	(Double question – closed.) Equality of rules and expectations.
G5: Yes.	Cultural desire.
G6: To be married.	Understanding of hegemonic social structures.

Due to the open-endedness of the discussion, the girls exhibited critical listening skills to determine the authenticity and truth about characters, extending Isbell *et al.*'s (2004) findings. Molly's deviation from the stereotypical ideal of feminine good behaviour, meant the girls initially reasoned that she was mean and unkind. They morally rejected her stealing despite the higher endeavour to save herself and her sisters and the self-sacrifice involved. The story illustrated that the higher status a man has, the more it can enable him to appear to act in an ethical manner, leading to the condemnation of the subordinate party who carries out his dubious moral requests. Even after having this explained, some girls continued to discipline the female due to their cultural conditioning, demonstrating their own stringent gender-policing, as Ornstein (2011) and Foucault (1995) predicted.

In a mixed group, a girl expressed wisdom not witnessed in other groups due to the imaginative experience of spectatorship, as proposed by Harding (1962:134). She creatively adopted the persona of Molly, which enabled her to appreciate Molly's position and the moral reason beneath her dubious actions. A boy, through his identification with the King as the strong male stereotype, continued to resist the alternative feminine subject position offered by the story and the diversity within gendered identities. Mallan (2009:151) explained Butler's argument that gender styles are never fully self-styled, as they are influenced by cultural histories. They only become sites of agency when there is variation due to challenge by alternative performative acts. The boy's unyielding response raised the question about the persuasiveness of alternative discourses and performances that are designed to draw male-female patterns closer together, as Davies (*cited in* McLeod, 1993) argued. To determine how critical gendered responses can be elicited and be effective, more stories need to be shared that exhibit alternatives to polarised 'male' orchestrated heroism and 'female' dumbed-down niceness (Kristeva, 1986; Favilli

and Cavallo cited in Saner, 2017). Phelps (cited in Quinn, 2019) emphasised how it was empowering for both men and women when more layered and complex female characters are presented. Hence storytelling can enable collective problem-solving, to establish a slow incremental movement towards gender parity.

5.4.2.4 *Intelligent trickster act*

In the fairy tales chosen, the female protagonists use their sharpness and ingenuity to save and empower themselves. Nelson (2007:163) asserted that the stories chosen by adults to share with children often direct them towards culturally gendered roles, developing communities of minds through unquestioned gendered metaphors and symbols. Bettelheim (1991:8) added that stories can illustrate how to escape oppressive fates and obligations and address the existential challenges and severe difficulties children may experience. Steedman (1982) questioned the choice of the particular fairy tales Bettelheim researched, and argued for the use of those which embodied more pervasive social beliefs. Fairy tales are important as they operate at the mythic level of our common currency of social ideology, ‘setting out power and money, glamour and romance...like pieces on a chessboard ready to be played with’ (op. cit.:142).

During a girls’ storytelling I encouraged the girls to imagine what they would do if they were Molly and the Ogre had tied a straw necklace around their neck and their sisters’ necks, whilst placing gold ones round his daughters’ necks. Through listening to one another’s suggestions, the girls became bolder and more creative:

R: What did you think Molly did?	
G1: Go home.	Passive and conflict avoidant.
G2: She went up to the Ogre and said you aren’t the Ogre!	Pushed the social gendered boundaries of respectability
G3: Swap them over with gold ones.	Critical interpretation and problem-solving

By allowing the girls to verbally play out the action, as Vygotsky (1978) advocated, it enabled abstract thought processes to occur and continue on into new thinking and problem-solving. Extending Bian et al.’s (2017) findings, as a result of cultural conditioning the girls were surprised to learn that it was Molly’s intelligence rather

than her appearance that brought Molly and her sisters' freedom. This was a critical understanding, as Mallan (2009:88) recognised, for otherwise girls can develop a lack of empathy and sacrifice their agency. By applying the skill of active listening, their critical responses showed how fairy tales can sometimes successfully challenge children's restrictive concepts of gender expectations and overcome gendered bias found in the classrooms, as Clarricoates (1978) presented.

In a boys' *Hansel and Gretel* storytelling group, a boy responded to the subversive storyline of Gretel overpowering the witch with a patriarchal riposte: 'And the woodcutter actually stays with her and kills the witch...' Advancing Davies' (1989:49) discussion on how individuals constitute themselves, the boy determined from his cultural knowledge that it was only with male support, the father-protector stereotype, that Gretel was able to outsmart the witch. Following Iser's (1980:111) theory that it is the implications in stories instead of statements that give shape and weight to meaning, the boy imaginatively inserted his own gendered understanding into the storyline. He subverted Gretel's clever and heroic action by reasserting his cultural desire for male supremacy, thereby demonstrating how hegemonic power is disguised as resistance (Foucault, 1980).

In a girls' *Hansel and Gretel* storytelling group, they struggled with Gretel's clever handling of the witch, as manipulation requires exploitation, deception and abuse towards another person rather than desired feminine 'niceness'. Their passive responses showed how some were internalising a limiting belief in feminine inferiority, that girls were weak and feeble. It is important to elicit critical gendered responses to challenge artificial hegemonic gendered constructions, which can sabotage children's self-worth and validity. Butler (2010) considered the possibility that 'there was no recourse to a "person", "a sex" or "a sexuality" that escapes the matrix of power and discursive relations' (op.cit.:44); significantly, it is defined through cultural concepts that can be changed. This raises the question about what constitutes the effective inversion, subversion or displacement within each gendered identity. She argued that if gender is denoted by the act itself, then the artificiality rather than the essentialist view of 'sex' or 'gender' can be developed, and I would add, can contest limiting perspectives.

5.4.3 Real mother act tile

The real mother tile presents the children's hierarchical perceptions towards parent figures. I will discuss how the blurring of the gender roles can reduce this gendered bias. As Butler (1988:520) explained, the result of regulatory social sanctions and taboos in our construction of 'natural' gendered behaviour is due to subtle and blatant coercions rather than consensus, and this needs to be elaborated for emancipatory purposes.

In a boys' discussion, they built on one another's collective thinking that fathers may be disguised as wicked, but they are still good underneath, unlike mothers. This biased stance illustrated the boys' own vulnerability to patriarchal exploitation and manipulation in their acceptance of the heterosexual matrix, as considered by Butler (2010). The story discussion provided one boy with the opportunity to critically reflect on his own life experience and realistically rationalise less than perfect paternal roles: 'No, the stepfathers can be as bad as the stepmothers because the...it's sometimes like... My cat scratched the sofa and he just said, "Oi," so I think they can'. Skewed perceptions of gendered roles were challenged, providing the opportunity to develop a rounder and more equal consideration of gender acts.

The girls' comments equally revealed the elitist male image that they were developing in preparation for their socially desired Prince Charming quests. These power relations are played out in fairy tales through the prime relationships as Rosen (2018) defined, and as Rowe (2005) claimed, whom we love is rarely neutral. Patriarchy rewards the girls' desire for a traditional matrimonial union with the promise of a virtuous handsome suitor, and interestingly, they awarded these qualities to the father figure:

R: Do you think stepfathers could be unkind?

G1: No

G2: They are too special.

Desire for the perfect suitor.

G3: They are too kind.

G4: They are too nice.

G3: ...and too handsome.

G2: Actually, mummies are more pretty.

Cultural oppressive desire for beauty.

G4: They could they have makeup on.

Exaggerated femininity.

G5: Dads can wear make-up too and that would be really funny. Cross-gender appearance.

G4: I've got make-up at home. Parental restrictive pressure for heteronormative conformity.

The girls' aesthetic responses indicated they were possibly developing Jung's (1915:69) Electra complex by romantically idolising their fathers. In contrast, Girl G2 considered her mother's bio-political act, and girl G4 reflected upon mothers' exaggerated endeavours of the perfectionist bodily norms; both philosophised in ideological feminine terms that can lead to dependency rather than empowerment. Their critical reflections exposed the hidden constraining nature of power relationships, although to develop deeper understanding more time and discussion would be needed.

In a mixed group's critical discussion about the father's part in abandoning his children in *Hansel and Gretel*, one girl stereotypically reinforced the cultural expectation for mothers to be the main self-sacrificial care-givers and be nice. Another girl philosophically considered a more realistic interpretation when this might or might not be the case: 'Some moms are nice...but my mum is like kind and not kind'. Following the children's train of thought and critically challenging the cultural story message that fathers are morally superior, enabled less discriminatory perceptions to be acknowledged and accepted.

I have shown that both genders were critical of women stepping out of their traditional caring roles, such as the stepmother and the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, liberally applying patriarchal authoritarian discipline to the deviant desires of the two women. In a boys' *Hansel and Gretel* storytelling group, they drew upon their ethics of justice as Gilligan (1982) proposed, and punitively judged the non-nurturing old woman:

B1: Naughty witch – you have to go to jail.

B2: I would have made the witch go into the factory and turn into baby bits. Women to be silenced and diminished.

B3: I would chop the wicked witch up with my massive hammer.

Boy B1's brutal judgement silenced the witch as the story had taught that non-nurturing women were to be admonished by shaming and humiliation for not supporting hegemonic heteronormativity (Butler, 1988:522). Boy B2's and boy B3's punishments were stereotypically extremely violent and gory. The discussion provided the opportunity to determine how to inspire critical gendered responses to these oppressive gendered values and suggest alternative desires to social 'natural' norms.

In a girls' group, they were naturally curious about the fate of the villainous stepmother. It was evident from the girls' inferences that they had already internalised forms of social control produced by cultural biopower, as Foucault (1980) discussed, and were contemptuous of her greedy behaviour. They too reprimanded her deviant acts in this case by transforming her into a small squeaky mouse:

G1: Why did she die? She was too old?	Philosophical reasoning.
G2: She didn't have any food. I don't know.	Empathy with plight.
G3: She was so fat like the world and she popped.	Moral bodily discourse.
R: They were starving. Although sometimes your stomach can swell if you are very hungry.	MKO about poverty.
G3: I thought it was because they were so fat...	Cultural self-discipline.
G4: Did she turn into a mouse?	Reduction of status.

By removing the mother's voice, the girls were indirectly removing their own autonomy and choice between nurturing and non-nurturing roles. The act demonstrated how power can mask itself as empowerment; the girls' condemnation of the mother leading to the subjugation of their own future choices. In another girls' group, they imposed even greater cultural sanctions and symbolically burned her as in the fairy story, thereby reinforcing the hidden power of social control on female subversiveness.

Paley (1990) and Lee (2016) suggested traditional gender stereotypes can be transformed by blurring the distinction between masculine and feminine rather than reversing the gender roles completely. In the *Hansel and Gretel* story, the two female characters, the stepmother and the wicked witch, enhanced the idea in this study. In a boys' storytelling group, they 'read' the emotional distance and

desperation of the two female characters as one and the same. This study built upon Rosen's (2018) reveal-conceal theory to extend children's imaginings and interpretations by building upon another's suggestions:

B1: She's the witch. She's actually the woman they showed before she was the mummy and she's actually the witch.	Blurring the acts.
B2: And she got in, and she followed them, creeping, and she went in to that house, and she can still see them and she dressed up in other stuff.	Imaginative identification.

Furthermore, a girl's identification of both desired and undesirable virtues within her drawing of the witch (Fig. 5.37), is evidence of an emerging understanding of the nature of the complexity of protagonists who can be made up of conflicting moral traits. As a character progresses through a story they can typically undergo a personality change due to an event, and not always for the better. The storytelling and critical discourses enabled the children to evaluate which side of the nature of the character will prevail and hence determine whether they are trustworthy or not, as in real life.



Fig. 5.37 A wicked-nice witch (school C).

In the older mixed group's critical discussion, the children philosophically reflected upon the similarity between the stepmother and the wicked witch:

G1: The mummy might have been the wicked witch.	Narrative interpretation.
B1: She's probably dead.	Acceptance of cultural punishment.
G1: She's the wicked witch.	Identification of deviant.
G2: Maybe she was dressed up.	Higher cognitive thought.
B2: She could have just given them away to the old people but then she wouldn't so she decided to make herself like a witch.	Empathy with children's plight.
G3: She put a mask on.	Blurring of virtues.
G1: She put a mask on that looked like her skin was old.	Deviant classified as ugly.
G2: I would want to keep my children all to myself.	Conformity to docile body.

The initial responses by girls G1 and G3 to the unexplained disappearance of the stepmother from the story demonstrated the social power of moral discourse in the creation of gendered docile bodies, as Foucault (1995) recognised. Their passive acceptance reflected their conformity to patriarchal seclusion and subjugation, which unless firmly confronted, can limit ambitions and needs whilst reinforcing unequal power relations. In contrast, an advanced empathetic response was made by boy B2, un-stereotypically giving evidence for Gilligan's (1982) ethics of care. By adopting Harding's (1962) spectator-participatory stance to the story, he critically considered how the stepmother could have considered adoption rather than abandonment, which young children predominantly fear. When considering Question 3, I determined how the children, especially the older groups, demonstrated an appreciation of the blurring of the stepmother's and witch's roles. I thus argue that there is an opportunity to build on the fluid understanding of gender as Butler (1988) advocated, necessary for forming equitable power relationships. This study developed Rogoff's (2003) findings that the hidden information in

children's daily lives is most often accepted without conscious awareness unless pointed out, and is therefore most likely to be regarded as the correct choice.

5.4.4 Caring father act tile

The caring father act tile will demonstrate the children's repressive perceptions of parental gendered roles that hinder fluidity between them, which Butler (2010) argued, is due to the heterosexual matrix. I will discuss how the children responded to a subversive 'softer' caring father role using the ambiguous illustration of the parent figure greeting them at the end of the *Hansel and Gretel* picture book.

Clarricoates (1978) and Stephens (1992:122) recognised the influence of stories and approaches in socialising children by forming gender discriminatory practices, and this study demonstrated the significance of the role model acts that are presented. In seeking to elicit critical gendered responses, I asked the children to consider who was greeting them in the illustration (Fig. 5.38). The Western cultural expectation is that the nurturing of the young and being home orientated is traditionally regarded as a woman's domain:

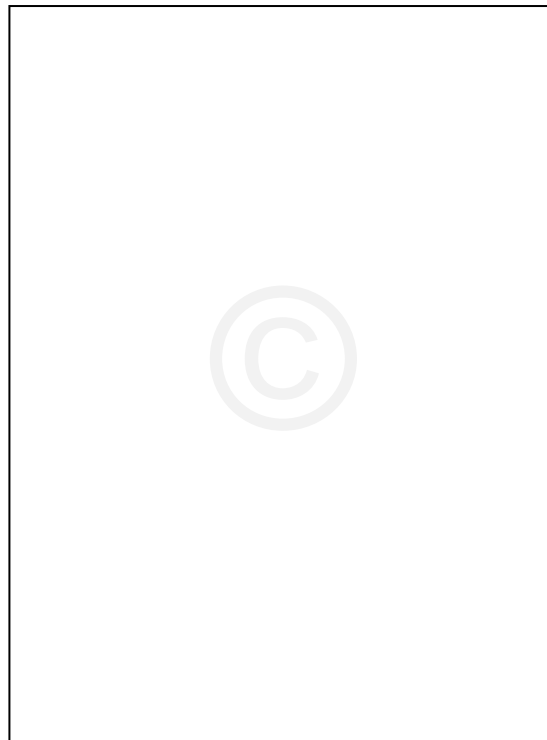


Fig. 5.38 A family embrace.

R: Look who's going to greet them when they get home?	
B1: The witch.	Visual interpretation of the stooped figure.
B2: Who is that?	Critical query.
R: What's happening here?	
B3: Hugging their Mum.	Traditional gender interpretation.
B4: What's wrong with that?	Desire for conformity.
R: Is that a woman? The person is wearing trousers and braces.	
B3: True.	Cultural norm.
R: They are hugging their Daddy...	

Extending Gilligan's (1982) gendered theory of ethics, it was evident from the boys' resistant responses that there was an absence of a caring father figure in the boys' minds and they struggled with the domesticated image in terms of a male act. Similarly, in the mixed group, the boys rejected the parental egalitarian notion of child care; some resisted the fatherhood duty of care by focusing on themselves as young boys, whilst others considered it would be tedious:

R: Would you have taken your children into the forest to die?	
B1: I don't think so because I didn't have any [laughs].	Rejection of fatherhood.
R: But if you had children?	
B1: I'm only six. [Group laughs]. Doesn't everyone know I'm six?	Resistant to caring role.
R: Would your father leave you behind do you think?	
B2: No because he <i>loves</i> me.	Desire for paternal love.
R: So, would you do the same for your children?	
B3: No, I not got children. I've just got a baby brother called Vinny.	Lack of care acts.

B4: If I was the father, I would stick them in the forest and I would just stay there until they wanted to go home.	Early negotiation skills.
B5: If I was the father, I would get bored of them soon. I would just chuck them away.	Conformity to childcare.

Boy B5's dismissive comment demonstrated his resistance to egalitarian power relations, thereby supporting structural heteronormative imbalances in the homestead. Gilligan (1982) denoted how boys are culturally directed towards the ethics of justice rather than of care, and this study illustrates that this can result in self-centred behaviour. Conversely, the importance of a warm loving father figure was still shown to be valued by boy B2, and by another boy who spontaneously expressed his feeling of happiness, singing a few lines of Simon and Garfunkel's (1968) song, 'Hello Mrs Robinson...', at the homecoming of Hansel and Gretel. It was interesting that whilst the children discussed with great reverence the preference for their fathers over their mothers as portrayed in the fairy tales, the drawings displayed a surprising anomaly: despite hard masculinity, as supported by Emmett (2016), there was a complete absence of any loving father figures. This was further amplified by the boys' responses indicating that they did not readily identify with a caring role and liberal family structures. As Okin (1989) argued, if men are encouraged to share in parenting more substantially, then their experience of nurturing would increase their capacity for empathy. I would suggest a greater variety of caring role models in stories is needed for boys.

I argue that when presenting caring father figures to the children, due to the unfamiliarity and lack of any strong role models in the stories shared, positive male nurturing roles are often overlooked when they are shown. In Browne's (2008) soft illustration of a father's embrace, I found that the children initially perceived him as a mother figure. He was contrary to the popular status-driven and heroic macho figure portrayed in most of the boys' drawings. The findings showed the difficulty of portraying an appealing loving father character in the current macho climate, as Wells (2015) discussed, without jeopardising their superior power and familial status. The need for a loving parental connection exists as reflected in many of boys' heroic tales, such as *Superman* and *Spiderman*. Children, both boys and girls, will surely not be able to change their perceptions if strong father role models are limited. Browne (2008) certainly portrayed fatherhood in a less macho but

masculine way, and it remains to be seen if illustrators and publishers will follow this example.

5.4.5 Summary

To answer Question 3, I investigated how the children critically responded to alternative and subversive gender role models and acts. Four mosaic tiled themes of critical responses arose (Fig. 5.39): perfect body acts, alternative heroic acts, real mother acts and caring father acts.

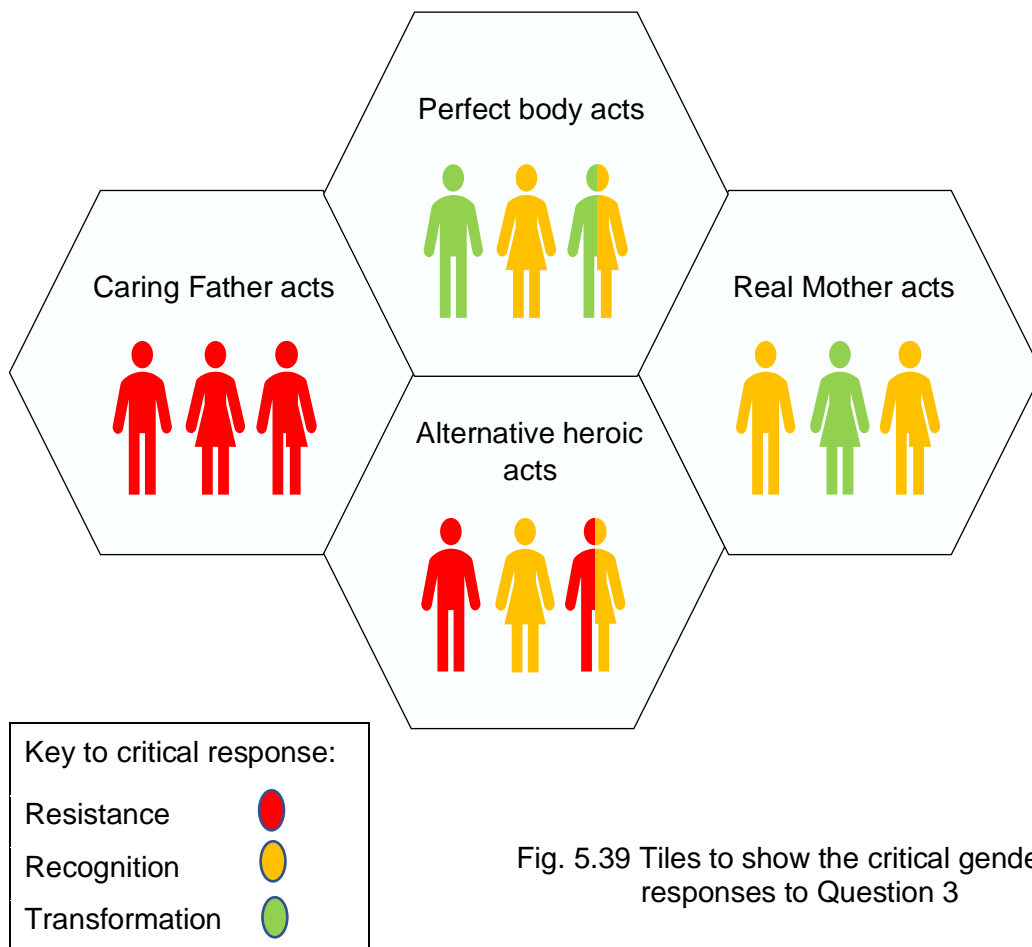


Fig. 5.39 Tiles to show the critical gendered responses to Question 3

Perfect body acts: The boys were found to incorporate Gilligan’s (1982) ethics of justice when implementing their cultural ideology of the individual responsibility for personal health and body shape. As the Foucauldian notion of docile bodies recognised, the desired acts are a form of social control, but they can equally be beneficial. The girls’ groups and the mixed groups focused particularly on external bodily appearances, supporting Hains’ (2014) and Harriger *et al.*’s (2019) research, and strongly upheld social category maintenance work, as Davies (1989) noted over thirty years ago. Visual symbolism was found to be effective in the blurring of

gender and intergenerational divides, and created the possibility of reducing binary perceptions.

Alternative heroic acts: Four main heroic acts were presented by alternative gender protagonists: adventurer, rescuer, benefactor and intelligent trickster. The findings supported Isbell's *et al.*'s (2004) and Wells' (2009) research about the need for open-minded discussions to encourage receptiveness to a fairy tale's liberating messages. The girls' responses supported the progressive Butlerian performative notion of 'acts over gender', although with the boys this was not so evident. This is important for the development of gender-neutral and egalitarian perceptions and the transformation of children's cultural language and understanding towards gendered symbolism (Bruner, 1990; Pullman, 2017). As Davies (1984) argued, a greater number of stories is needed for alternative gender discourses and performances to be persuasive. Additional provision would help prevent girls placing a glass ceiling on their own autonomy, and lessen the effects of the 'sticky floor' some were applying to themselves as well. The study has shown some evidence of boys working towards progressive mind-sets and the consideration of alternative gendered positioning through the challenges and actions the fairy tale characters presented, as occurs in real life.

Real Mother acts: Due to the boys' perception of patriarchal hierarchy, their vulnerability to patriarchal exploitation and manipulation was revealed, which critical discourse can re-address. As Rowe (2015) and Rosen (2018) recognised, the prime relationships encouraged by fairy tales are largely grounded on sociopolitical aspects of love, which the girls were found to be emulating without philosophical responses being encouraged. The absence of loving father figures in the children's drawings revealed the valuable opportunities storytelling provides in reducing the polarity of gender to promote greater equitable familial relations of power and respect (Butler, 1988).

Caring Father acts: As Gilligan's (1982) theory of gendered ethics indicated, the boys in particular, struggled with the alternative caring Father act and initially rejected it as undesirable. In juxtaposition, contrary to Emmet's (2016) proclamation for the provision of hard masculinity, the children's need for affectionate caring father figures was evident. Extending Wells' (2015) discussion, greater provision of empathetic and thoughtful affectionate acts may have a profound transformative

effect on both private and public spheres, creating balanced and holistic gendered understandings.

5.5 Question 4: How did the research participants respond to a gender-neutral storytelling approach?

Whilst aiming to elicit critical gendered responses, this study found that some of the young children used both ingenuous and explorative humorous discursive strategies to challenge the gendered-neutral storytelling messages. Foucault (1980) argued that social power can be disguised as resistance and is strongest when it is able to mask itself, 'its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms' (op. cit.:86). The findings showed how the children were attempting to conceal their resistance to hegemonic power through the use of humour. To reflect and illuminate Foucault's insights three key forms of humour were identified and represented in the mosaic tiles: joker humour (5.5.2), scatological humour (5.5.3) and satirical humour (5.5.4).

5.5.1 Humour challenges

This study argues that humour had a significant influence on the hierarchical positioning within the children's groups, as defined by Butler (1988) and was intertwined in the relational power dynamics. The humour delineated gendered boundaries and was often used to marginalise and evoke contempt towards the 'other', including the story characters and myself, the adult female researcher. The world of gender politics and relationships in storytelling provides a structure and forum to contemplate these developing identities and negotiate personal autonomy. Foucault (1980) added, 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet ... this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (op. cit.:95). In other words, resistance is an automatic *effect* of power rather than an avenue of agency, because resistance is performed within a power regime. The use of humour reflected the children's need to resist and transform their subordinate subject positioning as children. The hierarchical organisation of a school governs the behavioural boundaries of teachers' and children's moral acts and expectations respectively, and so produces the socially desired docile bodies (Foucault, 1995). The evidence showed that the children were learning to skilfully apply humorous discourse strategies to subvert and resist the unbalanced and non-egalitarian power relations.

5.5.2 Joker tile

With this in mind, I will discuss how one boy performed as a joker throughout the sessions to resist authoritarian power and fight against his own positioning as a child. He belonged to a mixed group and perhaps this was the reason for his embellished, domineering performance.

Butler (2011) analysed the way in which gender performativity influences the uses of repetition that are not necessarily to be regarded as freeing but as a cultural trap of conformist desire. 'Excuse me' was often the way this boy would introduce a quip, very politely and then he would challenge my authority, as a researcher and as a woman, to establish his superiority as a male. The status of a boy is often defined by the value of his humour amongst his peer group. In a Zog discussion he spotted the chicken legs of one of the dragons, and used the illustration as an excuse to do an exaggerated performance of a chicken:

R: 'Hi', said Madam Dragon way up in the sky. 'Now that you've been shown you can practice on your own. You will all be expert fliers by the time you're fully grown.'

B1: Excuse me. Those guys got yellow feet. He's a chicken [group laughs].

R: Okay. We have to listen.

B1: He's falling [group laughs].

R: That's what happens when you're learning to fly.

B1: I know. [Loud voice.]

B2: Like this. [Crash lands on the floor.]

By calling the dragon a 'chicken' and making the others laugh, boy B1 actively demonstrated his power within the group through his performance as a joker. This proved to be infectious amongst the boys who then pretended to fall and crash into a tree as Zog had done in the story. The self-silencing strategy of the girls in the mixed setting during the boys' dominant playful actions, displayed self-oppressive conformity to cultural feminine expectations which Gilligan (1982) had observed can occur. In the following sessions, the same boy frequently used the opportunity to act as the joker, turning a discussion into a nonsensical comedy scenario and so further empowering himself amongst his peers.

By performing in this way, the boy gained significant attention from myself and popularity from the group. His humorous acts dominated the discussion in spite of the efforts of one girl's critical thinking and inferencing; accordingly, she was the one who received direct praise for supplying the answer I was seeking. My approval indicated the hidden bias that can exist within the classroom, as discovered by Clarricoates (1978), which supports the cultural desire for girls 'to please'. As a result, the boy stereotypically responded by escalating his domination of the discussion with even more humorous quips. His rejoinders demonstrated his awareness that childhoods are rewarded more for their gendered performance than their learning achievements, as Lyotard (1984) recognised. In the *Willow Pattern* story session, he filled the room with his voice, singing words from the cartoon of Briggs' (1978) *The Snowman* story:

B: So now we we're going to see them at playtime 'flying through the air'...

In the last story session, *Hansel and Gretel*, his dominant behaviour became even more exaggerated as he added miming actions during the storytelling:

R: ...cat on the roof...

B1: Is that Santa Claus? [Group laughter].

R: ...on their way back home, they came to a white duck. Gretel asked the white duck...

B1: Treasure with lots of sweets in [Group laughter]. Oh my god, I want to eat them!

B2: Are those sweets?

B1: Here you go, here are some sweeties [Group laughter]. (Miming handing out some sweeties to some ducks.)

It was evident that his joker quips were beginning to push the boundaries of what was acceptable behaviour in classroom situations. Through further asserting his male superiority wherever possible over me, he was restricting my agency with both his voice and bodily actions. In juxtaposition, his actions were still in keeping with the story line, showing that he was actively 'living through' the story, imagining himself in the story world alongside the characters. This finding confirmed Long's (2017) and Rosenblatt's (1969:39) theories that listening to stories is a dynamic process, requiring personal engagement to form a meaningful experience.

Furthermore, his humorous retorts indicated the fluidity of the power-resistance relationship with myself, as female, and his active role in attempting to renegotiate a dominant gendered position (Foucault, 1980).

Humour was clearly used as a mechanism for social control and the complex manoeuvrings that characterise children's worlds. Although these results are not quite so extreme as Walkerdine's (1981:14–23) findings (Chapter 2.1.8), she had recorded similar discursive power relations and the use of language in a nursery classroom where two boys had upheld the Foucauldian productive notion of power and desire for gender conformity by re-positioning themselves as dominant. Ridicule is not easily amenable to adult intervention, and can lead to bullying and social tensions within groups. The disruptive joker strategy by the boy ensured that my attention was directed towards him and I found myself caught, echoing Clarricoates' (1978:353) hidden bias found within classrooms. His belligerent behaviour was interpreted by his teachers as a natural imaginative desire to assert himself, whereas for a girl it would be probably regarded as a character defect. In answering Question 4 on how participants responded to gender-neutral approaches, it was evident that the young joker's repertoire indicated the boys' growing appreciation and knowledge of how power can be flaunted defiantly in and out of the classroom. His resistance was enhanced by the girls' active desire to constrain and self-silence their own voices.

5.5.3 Scatological humour tile

A discussion of this tile will identify the crude and rude language that was expressed by both genders due to their equal fascination with bodily functions. Rather than using this language anti-socially, the evidence showed that both boys and girls used crude expressions to determine desirable norms of moral discourse and individual agency. As Foucault asserted (1995), political order is maintained through the use of biopower to produce docile bodies, which I would argue discourages critical perspectives. Walkerdine (1984:165) and Butler (1988) claimed that relations of power and resistance are constantly reproduced, both are in continual struggle and are constantly shifting, creating the potential for change.

In a boys' *Willow Pattern* story activity group, it was evident that boy B2 introduced sexualised knowledge to encourage me to recognise his superior 'male' status through the use of a visual discourse:

B1: I'm going to colour my fish in.

B2: I'm ready for my scary bit. I'm ready for my silly bit.

B3: What scary... I'm ready for my billy, silly-billy bit.

B2: Now I'm going to put my willy on.

R: No, no. No. That's a button? Okay.

B2: I'm drawing my willy.

R: No, no, we're not being rude; otherwise I have to send you back to the class...

The boy's use of 'willy' can be seen as an attempt to subvert the generational differences that can exist and to reposition me within their own sub-culture. It was evident that the freedom to resist the sexual repressive discourse was valued by them. I noted that I still adhered to the historical ideology of childhood innocence, by exercising a moral judgement on the anatomical sexual discourse revealing my own risk anxiety, as Levine (2002) and Blaise (2013) recognised. On reflection, an effective course would have been to address the children's resistance to biopower with the use of appropriate anatomical terms, and to balance the power differential between us.

In a girls' *Paper Bag Princess* storytelling group, girl G1 noted that in the illustration of Prince Ronald being carried away by the dragon, his trousers seemed to have slipped down to expose his bottom. Another girl declared she could see Princess Elizabeth's boobies; however, she was drawing on her body memory as the androgynous illustration (Fig. 4.2) of the princess did not include any nipples:

R: Unfortunately, a dragon... You remember dragons. Smashed her castle, burnt all her clothes with his fiery breath and carried off poor Prince Ronald. Oh!

G1: Look, I can see his bottom!

R: That's right, and unfortunately, she's left with no clothes on.

GIRLS: [Laughs]

G2: And I can just see her boobies.

As with the boys' group, I consciously avoided any discussion involving sexuality, due partly to my fear of sexism that Saletan (2011) noted occurs in schools. Moreover, my own self-restraining practice following hegemonic heterosexual

performativity limited the girls' active exploration of knowledge and attitudes regarding gender and sexuality (Tesar *et al.*, 2016). Although as Butler (2010) debated: 'If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (op. cit.:9). In retrospect, the girls' freedom of expression may have been a rare challenge to my authority due to a growing familiarity, or simply a reflection that they had come to trust me as a co-female within the group.

Then at the end of the story, in response to Prince Ronald's rebuke of Prince Elizabeth's appearance, the girls suggested possible forms of punishment for his arrogant rudeness and ungratefulness; one that was feasible in the story world and one that was crude and subversive to feminine desirable behaviour:

G1: Maybe she should lock him back in jail again.

G2: No, maybe punch him in the bottom [laughter].

In a girls' *Molly Whuppie* oral storytelling, one girl tried to make sense of an ogre and his behaviour on her own terms. The other girls made fun of him with reference to their Ogre imagery memories from DreamWorks Animation's *Shrek* (2001), which even filmmakers themselves have incorporated (Fig. 5.40):

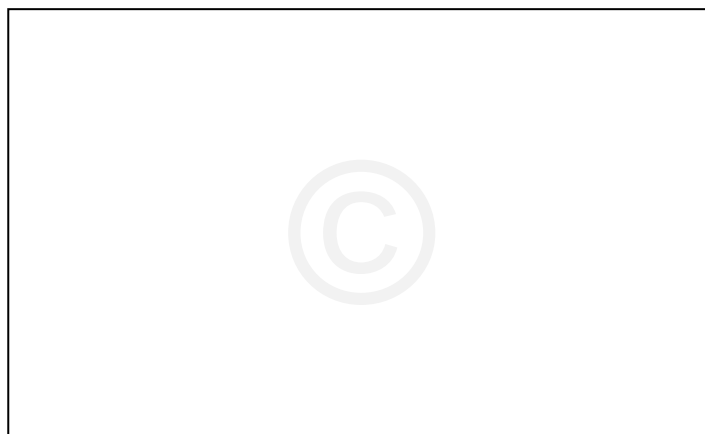


Fig. 5.40 Princess Fiona observes the arrow that has landed in Shrek's bottom.

Later in the discussion the girls seized the opportunity to explore the power these remarks have and to subvert their docile positioning, which can result in

ostracization, as Foucault (1995) conjectured. This social self-regulating ‘othering’ was acknowledged by their request to express their crude comment speedily:

G1: Can I say something quickly...the Ogre could have stuff from his bottom...

G2: The Ogre has a big bottom.

It was interesting that the girls carried the humorous Ogre body imagery throughout the story session, concluding with un-stereotypical aesthetic responses in both the story discussion and their drawings:

R: She married the prince and they all lived happily ever after. The end. My story is done.

G1: Can I have the ring?

R: Yes, I will just find it in my story bag. Yes? Not about the Ogre.

G2: I would dress up as a nose and a bogey [Laughs loudly].

R: Okay. Shhh.

I observed that I again set a moral boundary as to what was acceptable for discussion with the girls, imposing institutional moral restrictions on the girls ‘to be good’. Their drawings reflected the opportunity provided by the story activities to be culturally subversive to the desired feminine perfect bodies, by presenting alternative revolting and crude images.



Fig. 5.41 The big fat Ogre (school C).

One girl drew a large bold picture of an ogre with the captions '*Big fat Ogre is a bogey brain*' and '*don't be mean*', thereby subverting the cultural gendered power ratio (Fig. 5.41)

Another girl drew the Ogre and Molly Whuppie in comparison to one another, like *Beauty and the Beast*. The Ogre was crudely drawn, with his large stomach and red belly button, in contrast to the traditional demure portrayal of femininity. The girl's adherence to the desirable patriarchal interpretation of Molly Whuppie with feminine symbolism, flowers, revealed her own self-regulatory behaviour and resistance to the alternative robust femininity exhibited in the fairy tale (Fig. 5.42).



Fig. 5.42 A traditional interpretation of an alternative female character, Molly (school C).

Overall, the findings present a strong cultural desire for Foucauldian docility, and as Rousseau (2012:127) cautioned, restricting the children's ability to generate ideas and be provocative. This study indicated how eliciting critical gendered responses can reveal gender bias; the girls were being actively discouraged from exploring the use of humour in relationships of power. They were being coerced to be humourless and passive, although some girls did draw humorous illustrations of the Ogre from *Molly Whuppie* based on their story media memories of *Shrek*. I observed that none of the female characters were drawn in a humorous fashion; rather the opposite. Notably, it was only the older girls who explored the 'other' - male body imagery -

both in their verbal language and drawings, evidence of their curiosity of the Foucauldian biopower presented in the stories.

In a *Hansel and Gretel* storytelling discussion the older girls were more comfortable describing Hansel and Gretel's stepmother in crude terms, as the boys had done:

G1: She looks bad and evil.

G2: She looks horrible and...

G3: She looks like a fart.

G4: She looks a bit like a pig [group laughs].

When the children were experimenting with self-regulating Foucauldian bio-power, I found that the conflict between my roles as a researcher and a teacher emerged, in determining the balance between maintaining the kind of control that adults exert over children in school whilst allowing freedom of individual expression and potential creativity (Clarricoates, 1978).

It was in the mixed groups' storytelling discussions where the scatological humour was found to be innovative. For instance, in the Zog mixed storytelling group, a boy recounted how his Scalextric cars would rarely stay on the track, instead they would 'widdle' off it when he was racing them around with his father. His humorous return illustrated a home spun use of a lavatory word whilst flouting the cultural setting of the storytelling group. It was evident that the use of scatological humour had a positive influence on the boys' responses to language by creatively using slang words, such as 'widdle'. From their use of scatological humour, it was evident that hegemonic patriarchal positioning was occurring as Butler (1988) claimed; the girls following the boys' lead rather than taking the initiative themselves to test the moral boundaries:

R: What would you like to get a medal for? At school. For doing something like running, helping...

B1: I want to be a trophy [group laughs].

R: Or a trophy. What would you like a trophy for?

B2: A trophy for being the best [group laughs] going to the toilet [group laughs].

G1: Stinkiest socks

This cultural subservience is important to note for teacher mediation, to prevent any hidden discriminatory bias occurring in classrooms, as Clarricoates (1978) observed.

This dominant performative behaviour became further stylised in a mixed *Willow Pattern* story discussion, where a boy manipulatively used scatological humour to undermine a girl's reasoned response:

R: She probably loved him and didn't like his decision. What do you think?

G1: Because she didn't like him and she wanted to kill him and she didn't like him at all.

B1: No, he wanted to go to the toilet.

Later in the storytelling session, the boys experimented with the production of power to protect themselves against tyrannical authority by taking turns in forming scatological responses to the father's undemocratic ruling:

R: ...think about the end of the story...

B1: She turned into a bird and they didn't want to do anything and they laid some eggs on the father...like they were flying and then the egg popped out of their bum and it landed on the father. They went, um, six eggs, on the father and then the chicks came out.

B2: It's my go; I think she made the right choice because she wanted to be a nice bird. If my parents told me to do something, I wouldn't do it, I would get one of my tricks like fake teeth and put it in their pants.

The boys' subversive narratives are similar to those of Max's imaginative response to his mother's authoritative stance in Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*. Significantly, it was the boys who reacted this way and rarely the girls, possibly because they are encouraged to be dependent on male figures. They are more aware of their vulnerability and of the danger of exclusion that leads to their own voluntary docility rather than equal empowerment (Foucault, 1995). Unexpectedly, in the *Molly Whuppie* mixed group a girl added a scatological comment, possibly seeking acceptance from the boys, the dominant social group.

R: Holds up ring

B1: Can I try it on?

B2: You're a girl...

R: Make a wish!

B3: I would wish for...a hundred bananas!

G1: I would hide under the toilet...

The girl's wish to hide showed a degree of dependency due to the cultural promotion of the desire to be protected. Meanwhile a boy was scorned by another for expressing a desire to try on jewellery, clearly deemed as a female rather than a male endeavour. As this question has investigated, their resistant responses to gender-neutral storytelling approaches reflected the polarised gender identification that was growing in some of the children, but was not as fixed in others. This evidence indicated the potential for overcoming resistance to transformative thinking, as Butler (1988:528) had recognised.

5.5.4 Satirical humour tile

I will investigate in this tile how satire is often used to shine a light on the shortcomings of those in power, which has evolved into jokey humour. I will discuss how the transcript showed that only the boys were learning to use satire, mostly to assert their male superiority.

In a boys' discussion group, a boy effectively used satire through the use of extraordinary visuals by humorously ridiculing and undermining the witch's house as a '*custard*' one and seeing his peers react, extending Paley (1990) observations. This humorous covert tactic was often employed subconsciously by boys to enhance male hegemonic power even over threatening story features. The boy's quip could be regarded as a mental rebellion almost against the witch's powerful status as a home owner by 'stupidifying' her house. This form of social control and dominance was not found to occur in the girls' groups due possibly to their perception of themselves as subordinate.

In a *Hansel and Gretel* boys' group, it was shown how positive self-schemas can regulate behaviour when participants are self-aware. The discussion showed the power of fairy tales in constructing behavioural conceptions of normality and deviance, to make the norms appear moral or 'right' and in the desire to conform

(Foucault, 2001). The discussion furthered Gilligan's (1982) ethics of justice, and the recognition of the importance of rule-making for boys through self-regulatory declarations:

R: 'Stupid girl!' said the witch.

B1: You don't say idiot.

B2: You're not allowed to say that.

B3: Or stupid face, or bollocks.

B4: Or 'my god'.

B2: Oh my gosh you mean.

R: She's not being very nice.

B4: Maybe she's going to turn into a monster.

B3: I think she is very scary looking at us.

The superiority theory of humour psychology suggests that we laugh at others when we have been caught out ourselves, and wish to prevent being caught out in the same situation again. The satirical intention comes from the *schadenfreude* thrill of having someone fall for it – particularly when that person is in a position of power, which boys B1, B2 and B4 were attempting to do with myself, the female researcher. It was evident that the boys were pushing against the acceptable behavioural boundaries, indicating their resistance to power in the classroom and society. My stereotypical conformist judgement highlighted Biddulph's (1997) and Skelton's (2002) concern about the feminisation of schooling, where schools support female virtues and expectations. They argued for the need of re-masculinisation of school environments to reinforce traditional notions of masculinity alongside those of femininity. However, this adherence to the sex role theory does not take into account variation, resistance and individual agency, and the gender-neutral perspectives needed for progressive and transformative changes in the production of equal power relations and opportunities.

My research has demonstrated that humour was beginning to be used to define group membership, particularly by the boys. Humour was clearly used as a mechanism for self-regulation, resistance and the complex manoeuvrings that characterise children's worlds to reposition themselves as more powerful and popular.

5.5.5 Summary

In determining “How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?”, it was evident humorous approaches were used to challenge the social power existing in the research groups and with myself, a female researcher. It was found that they used three main forms of humour, represented by the tiles (Fig.5.43): joker, scatological and satirical, resulting in complex power relational practices as Walkerdine (1981) observed.

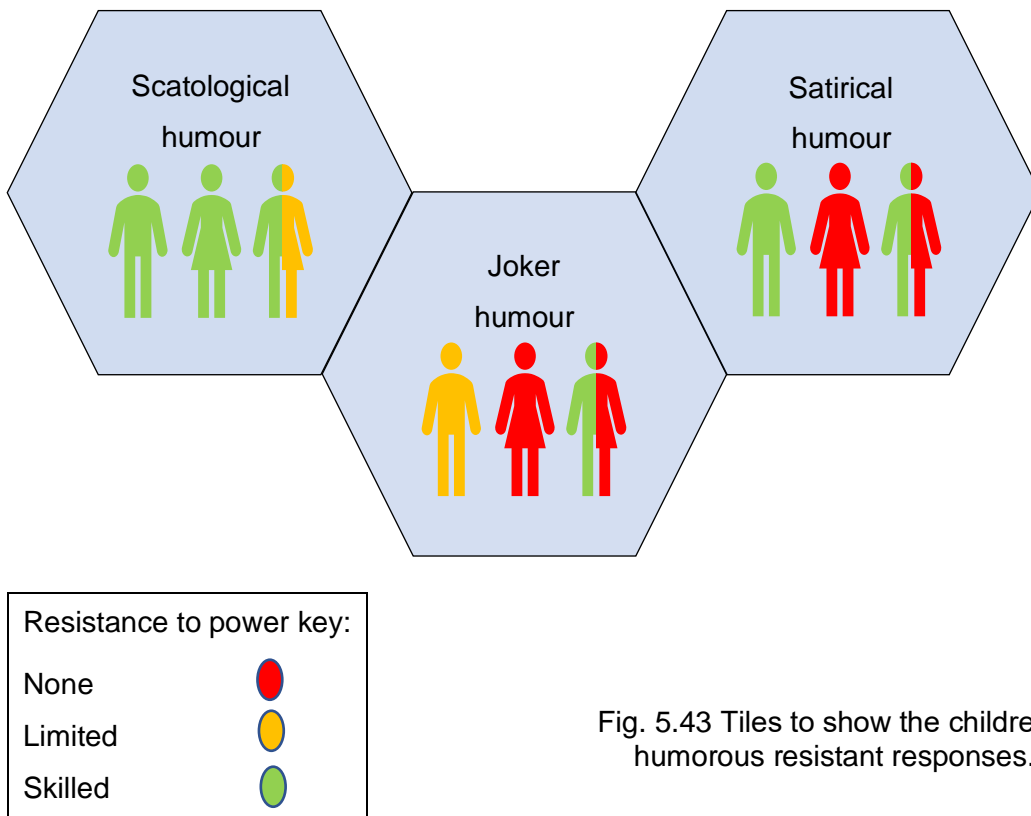


Fig. 5.43 Tiles to show the children’s humorous resistant responses.

Joker: This form of humour was used by one boy in particular to reinforce hierarchical ranking positioning, often pushing against classroom behavioural boundaries due to the dichotomy of social and educational desired gender performances. In the mixed group, the girls responded by applying a self-silencing strategy, as Gilligan (1982) discovered, equally exaggerating a desired performance of gender that resulted in the successful creation of Foucauldian docile bodies. This was significant, because as the boys were learning how to become more accomplished in the dominant use of power through verbal discourse, as Walkerdine’s (1984) findings demonstrated, girls were losing social confidence and becoming less powerful.

Scatological humour: Both the boys and girls were found to use this crude humour to challenge hierarchical authority, combining both Butlerian and Foucauldian aspects of power. Gender was found to influence their resistant responses to authoritarian father figures: the boys considered physical bodily acts, such as dropping poo on the Mandarin or putting false teeth in his pants, whilst the girls focused on the moral discourse of bodily appearance, such as how the Ogre had a big belly and bogies in his nostrils. It was noted that in the mixed groups, the girls would often follow the boys' lead, hence complying with hidden power relations and expectations as Clarricoates (1978) recognised.

Satire: This was found to emerge much more amongst the boys themselves, and effectively used as a self-regulatory practice based upon heteronormative expectations, as denoted by Butler (1988) but in a more extreme aggressive and exaggerated way. Positive self-schemas were found to be effective in addressing these occurrences to support emotional resilience amongst the boys.

I found that the children's humorous responses challenged my feelings of control both as a female researcher and in the *loco parentis* position. These challenging power and male-female dynamics influenced the boundaries of critical responses, and in some cases, effectively limited my ability to scaffold discussions as a Vygotskian MKO.

5.6 Chapter conclusion

In this study, I used thematic analysis to connect the related tiles of themes and categories to form a multimodal mosaic (Fig. 5.44). By combining the gendered themes identified in the four questions' findings, they illustrate effective methods and strategies to determine: "How can a critical gendered response be elicited in young children using fairy tales?" Questions 1, 2 and 3 formed intertwined strands through the mosaic, whereas Question 4 was fragmented around the edges. The tiles for Question 4 were dispersed rather than combined, reflecting how the children's humorous abilities and resistant strategies could be applied in response to more than one topic area within the confines of the educational context in which they were learning.

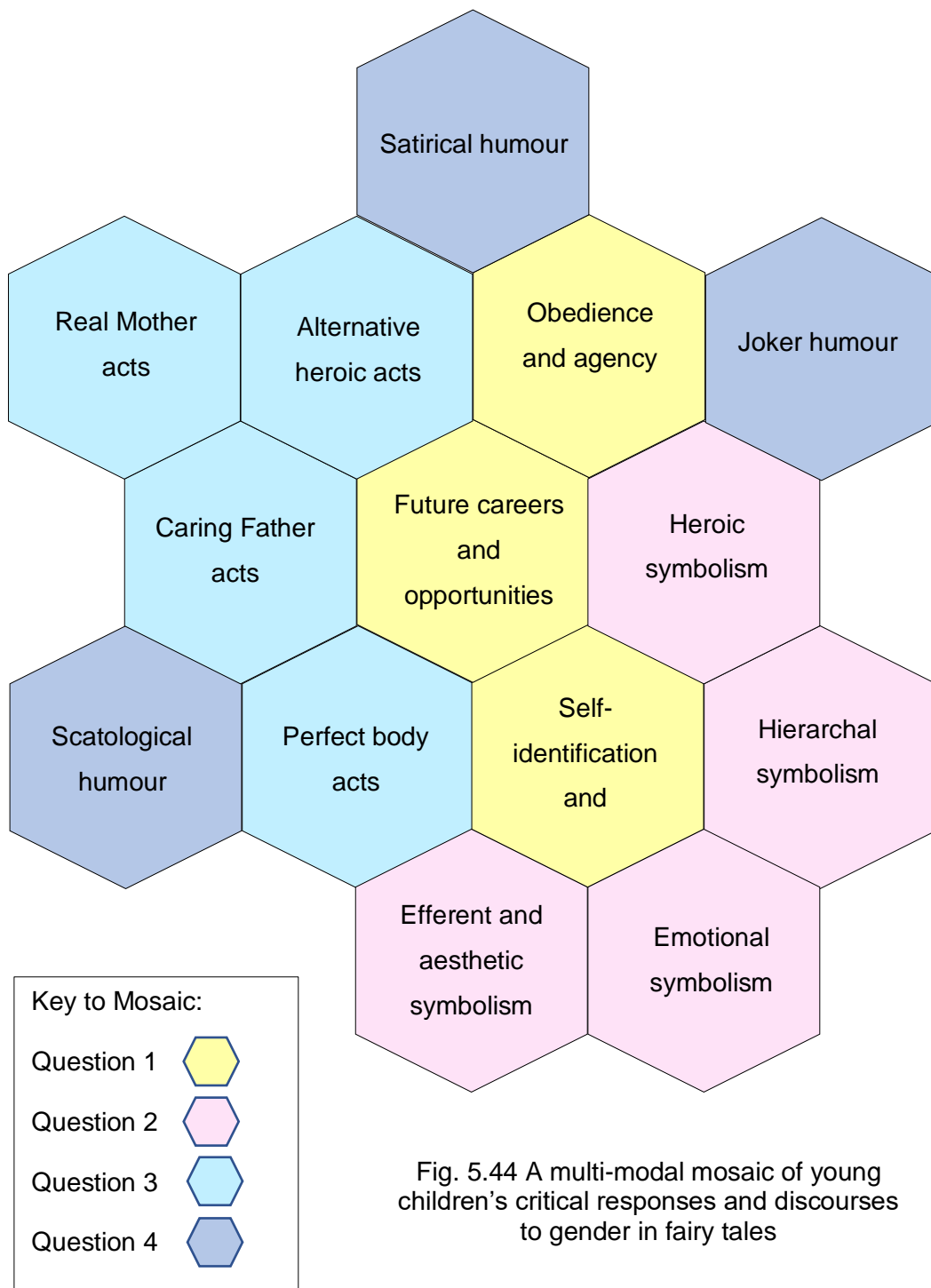


Fig. 5.44 A multi-modal mosaic of young children's critical responses and discourses to gender in fairy tales

This study has shown the importance of a pedagogical interactive model for change in order to support Vygotskian higher cognitive thought for creative and progressive gender discourses. I argue that this model helped to broaden the critical understanding of Gilligan's (1982) ethics of justice and caring acts for both genders, and thereby contribute to promoting egalitarian and democratic power relations. I have demonstrated the importance of rethinking the delivery of EY literacy by

promoting pedagogies of choice. This approach encourages critical thinking and listening as well as the use of multimodal language and approaches with young children to enable greater aesthetic and emotional expression, and positive behaviour. This has implications for the delivery of the critical literacy practice and the principle of choice regarding children's curiosity, especially for girls. I argue that if children encounter an adult (gender) biased literary selection, then they unlearn the habit of choice and surrender the right to be interested. This study showed that learning to choose is equally an essential part of learning to learn and of developing a personal identity.

The results established that contemporary childhoods are receiving a wide range of cultural messages that emphasise the binary aspects of gender rather than its similarities. To develop an ideal curriculum, stories need to exhibit alternatives to overcome restrictive self-surveillance measures, and develop positive self-affirmations for future careers and well-being. As the results perhaps surprisingly discovered, even at this young age the children are resistant to emancipatory messages. I argue that the findings are a cautionary warning that any gender conformity can lead to marginalisation due to their desire to belong and what it means to belong. This study demonstrated that the use of alternative protagonists enabled a new culture to be forged with the children, thereby creating more opportunities for diversity and for them to tell their own story. A critical element that was highlighted was the necessity for giving children, and in particular girls, opportunities to discuss matters that affect them. If the research was to be conducted again, I would work with only single sex groups for the girls as they were the least receptive in the mixed-sex groups, whereas the boys were mostly consistent in either single or mixed sex groups, their peers being the greatest influence.

To overcome restrictive cultural perceptions and disciplinary measures in research such as this, I would argue for re-thinking the researcher-child participant relationship. The use of critical reflexivity and consideration of the establishment of personal and professional relationships was a crucial factor in conducting this study. I realised that my own responses made in the moment could be challenged afterwards from a critical perspective, such as exercising a moral judgement on the anatomical sexual discourse that reinforced, rather than challenged, traditional hegemonic structures. The mosaic approach proposed a researcher-child relationship of simple reciprocity and acceptance of one another, based upon

mutual respect. I would argue that the relations were not truly reciprocal: I was conducting the study from both a feminist researcher and the child's perspective, whereas the child was only responding from their perspective. When considering relationships within groups, since children learn from cooperative activity, it was necessary that they cooperated rather than resisted hegemonic authority. However, there is one mandatory relationship rule in all EY settings; the teacher's voice *must* be heard. A teacher's authority is often derived from the quality of the relations with the children, which then allows them to wield it. As the boys' group showed in their resistance to a 'female' researcher, there was a need to seek alternative authority, such as the equality and gender-neutral values in the school curriculum and policies, and even the local community. This study showed that every word that I said counted, even the most neutral comment had an influence on researcher-child power relations. I argue that the difficulty of reciprocity can be overcome by considering a relationship triangle, with the critical storytelling discussions and activities, myself and the children, but engaged for different purposes. I would support freedom of speech, both *isegoria* and *parrhesia*, to help challenge gendered boundaries and to reduce the development of limited perceptions.

From the children's critical responses and their imaginative interpretations and transformations of gendered stereotypes in fairy tales, the findings obtained will be triangulated with those of the next two chapters. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 will reflect upon the parents' questionnaire responses and the teachers' questionnaire and interview responses respectively, analysing their perceptions and approaches to stories and gender-neutral storytelling, their understanding of children's gendered relationships and expression, and their strategies for the transformation of gendered stereotypes and language.

6 Parents' perspectives

6.1.1 Parents' questionnaires

Chapter 5 presented the research findings from the children's responses to this study's investigation: "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?". In Chapter 2, four sub-questions were raised to investigate the central question, and axial themes were drawn from the thematic analysis and critical reflexivity of the data. To gather further information about the context of children's meaning-making on gender and the effect of social interdependency, questionnaires were sent out to the parents of the participant children (Appendix 8). Half of the questionnaires, thirty-three in total, were returned: thirty-two received from mothers, one received from a father. Due to the politically sensitive nature of the questionnaire, interviews with parents were discouraged by the state schools: two informal conversations were held with a father and a mother at school WS. To enable comprehensive and reliable interpretation and triangulation of the results, the qualitative data was analysed under the same sub-question headings as used for the children's responses. This chapter focuses upon the findings of the parental questionnaires.

Gender is a politically stigmatised topic that has become associated with militant feminist controversial issues, especially involving matters concerning egalitarianism, equality and power structures within personal relationships. This may explain why only the mothers of the participant younger children returned the questionnaires. The lack of responses from fathers or male carers, may to some extent confirm Emmett's (2015) report about men's lack of involvement with young children's storytelling. I would suggest that the evidence indicated that they may feel that questionnaires to do with the children are more the mother's province. Even after prompting a couple of fathers from the state schools about the questionnaires, it was their partners who completed them. In school WS, I managed to informally discuss a few areas on the questionnaire with a father; this was possible as the teachers had requested that I participated in the whole kindergarten day when conducting my research enabling a collaborative rapport to be built with some of the parents. There was an equal response to the questionnaires from mothers of sons to those of daughters. In the demographics section, one mother from school WS adamantly pronounced: 'I am a whole woman; I am all a woman and will remain a woman for ever. I'm not transgender or anything else'. There was a strong unspoken collective sentiment among the mothers who rooted their sexual being

inside their feminine identity that confirmed Butler's (1988) argument about the feminist radicalisation of sociopolitics that overlooked diversity within gender. All the parents were aged between 25 to 49 years old. Most held professional occupations, from a television production manager, to an accountant, to a National Health Service manager; only in school WS did the parents define themselves in traditional heteronormative family roles, such as housewife and 'full-time Mummy'.

6.2 Question 1. Which dominant discourse did the children raise concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations?

6.2.1 Intergenerational favourites

It was evident that many of the stories that the mothers shared with their children were ones that they had enjoyed when they were young, furthering McCabe *et al.*'s (2011) research on how gender representations reproduce and legitimate cultural understandings of gender. All of the favourite books listed were fiction, with only one book, Thomas' (1987) *Winnie the Witch*, having a leading female name in the title. Many of the books contained stereotypical male protagonist whose titles included descriptive hierarchical language promoting perceptions of superiority: *champion*, *fantastic* and *super*. I found that the boys' mothers emulated these cultural casts in phrases such as 'my son is an action boy' when describing their children. In contrast, if the girls displayed un-stereotypical and alternative traits they were categorised in the titles as 'naughty', as seen in the popular book choice, Edwards' (2010) *My Naughty Little Sister*. In the school WS, a father explained that the moral purpose of stories was significant to him:

'I try to tell them stories about my life, and us, when I tell them stories. When I read to them from Buddhist principles and Taoist principles, which is what I follow. And sometimes they get storybooks as well. But generally, that's more their mum. And whenever I read storybooks, I try to put a moral philosophy behind it. Because I think it's really important, especially because they're brothers, they fight a lot'.

I considered the father's reference to two major Eastern religions, similar to the Judaeo-Christian bias found in Northern European fairy tales; they all propagate the traditional idea of male superiority. His comment indicated an awareness of the complexity and conflicting messages surrounding male dominance and alternative performativity. From the hundred plus books listed in the questionnaires, it was a

WS parent that included the only story with a strong positive role model of fatherhood, where a father is shown to be actively enjoying the hurly burly of family life. It was a humorous Finnish book, '*Dad Let's Go Boating! (Isä, Lähdetään Saareen!)*', written by Markus Majaluoma (2002).

6.2.2 Story selections

To investigate the gendered role models being presented to the children I asked the parents about the traditional fairy tales they had shared. The boys' parents' responses indicated that they shared stories with stereotypical male role models, such as *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The Gingerbread Man*, *The Elves and the Shoemaker* and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*: all with adventurous and risk-taking protagonists. One parent divulged, 'I've tried fairy tales, but he's not really interested'. This was significant as the comment was made by a school C parent, where the boys' culture was found to be extremely macho. I discerned that the mothers were supporting the male schemata through their competitive descriptions about their sons' progress in reading, as evident when one wrote that she shared picture books, 'occasionally, but our son prefers chapter books'. Thereby supporting the patriarchal requirement for boys to be high 'academic achievers' and the drive for future career success and status. Books that promote stereotypical behaviours, such as Firth and Sims' (2010) *Usborne's Illustrated Classics for Boys* and *Disney's 365 Bedtime Stories* (2017), also appeared in their favourite book lists. Extending Pullman's (2017) discussion on the need for openness in stories about sensitive and taboo issues, the parents were found to be uncritical in following the publishers' recommendations on gender suitability, thereby presenting limited role models and inadvertently supporting cultural conformity. This reinforcement of dominant stereotypes can lead to the stricter self-governance of boys' behaviour amongst their peer groups, extending Foucault's notion that self-monitoring is enhanced through discourse and practice. Moreover, a boy's parent stated, 'My son chose *Beast Quest* (Blade, 2007) when he had a book voucher – he picked this book because of the pictures on the front cover and the pictures inside'. Illustrations shared with children support their fictionalisation of self and the naturalisation of gender norms, but to critique them they need to be discussed, as Butler (1988) advocated.

The girls' parents were found to share 'softer' traditional princess fairy tales such as *Cinderella*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Goldilocks* and *Little Red Riding Hood*; no 'alternative'

princesses were mentioned. One parent commented that her daughter 'loved' Disney's *Frozen*, but that she personally avoided it, demonstrating a silent resistance to the pink princess culture. A school C girl's parents added how her daughter enjoyed humour, citing Andreae's (2012) *Sir Scallywag and The Golden Underpants*, as did some boys' parents whose sons favoured similar titles, such as Freedom's (2016) *Aliens Love Underpants*. Although the children's discussions included humour, especially in school C, only the girls' drawings reflected the humorous portrayal of male character figures. No humorous female characters were drawn, even though Princess Fiona was an Ogre also. I further observed that neither were any humorous female characters mentioned in the book titles listed by the parents. The results indicated a biased stereotypical trope being supported: male rebels are to be revered, whilst female ones are to end in obscurity.

6.2.3 Censorship of content

Censorship of certain scenarios in fairy tales is important to consider because it is a form of social power, as Foucault (1980) argued, that can lead to the possible restriction of the growth of personal independence and autonomy. Bettelheim (1991) discerned that parents preferred stories that presented their children with an experience of wish fulfilment, as opposed to those that included risk taking and challenges with the assistance of the supernatural or magic. I would argue in Foucauldian terms that this reflects their cultural desire for passive conformity rather than critical reflection. The findings showed that all the mothers had reservations about sharing fairy tales' meanings, which strongly indicated their preference for 'softer', less threatening personal challenges. The girls' mothers described how they avoided stories with horrible elements, such as cannibalism, physical mutilation or death. The girls were found to struggle with some of the protagonists' moral choices in the story discussions, even when I explained the reasons for their dubious actions to them (Chapter 5.4.2.3). One girl's parent, from school C, philosophically reflected that although she avoided stories with fierce wolves or bears, she still shared *Beauty and the Beast* with her daughter. One boy's parent explained that she would consciously avoid the old versions of stories such as *The Three Little Pigs*, to discourage critical questions at bedtime about the pigs getting eaten by the wolf. Another boy's mother wrote about her hesitancy towards *Hansel and Gretel*, 'I feel this one is too dark; I don't like the children being abandoned by the father and then killing the witch at the end'. It is interesting that she placed a different emphasis on the parental roles to those of the children, who had collectively

reflected a misogynistic stance and placed the blame on the mother instead of the father. The mother's response perhaps reflected her own fear of 'what if' her partner did the same and that she would consequently be ostracised by society, like the witch. This shows, as Williams (2014) established, that storytelling can provide valuable experiences for girls to imagine how to become empathetic, autonomous and resilient to social disciplinary and marginalising measures, which is dramatically reduced by parental sanitisation. Furthermore, Paley (1990) believed censorship limited children's anchorage of fantasy to the purposefulness of stories and understanding of the real world and so prevented any dexterity of the imagination.



Fig. 6.1 Gretel pushing the witch into the oven.

In response to the metaphorical image of Gretel finding inner strength and courage (Fig. 6.1), the parents interpreted it literally rather than understanding it to be about overcoming dependency and self-sacrifice. They expressed a sub-conscious cultural resistance towards sharing the picture with their children saying: 'Have avoided this – my son would find this upsetting (aged 4), even though it's a fairy tale'; 'Not happy, she is too young'; 'Yes, we have read it, but glossed over the ending'; 'It's gruesome'; 'Yes, diluted it'; 'No, given that evil witches don't even exist, hard to relate to real life'. The parents' responses illustrated Phillips' (2011) observation of the misogynistic fear in traditional cultures of strong dominant women. This was shown to occur even amongst women, as amongst the children, and their discouragement of the act of stealing over survival and emancipation.

These biased and discriminatory results illustrate the need for the use of fairy tales to critically examine perceptions. In school A, a boy's parent's comment revealed a participatory approach, 'I would show the pictures to my children and explain what I see and ask them what they see'. Moreover, in school WS a parent remarked how her son won a prize for best storyteller of the year telling this story and that she thought it was a lovely fairy tale picture. Some of the boys' mothers may have been more open due to the fact that Gretel displays pro-typical male attributes, being heroic and brilliant, as Saini (2017) discussed, which patriarchy encourages in sons.

6.2.4 Future careers and ambitions

I examined parents' perceptions about the stereotypical roles of breadwinner and homemaker, outside and inside the home, in metaphorical terms: chopping wood and baking a cake. Their responses indicated that they believed that gendered equality had been achieved contrary to Layard's (2020:171-2) evidence. A boy's mother declared, 'My children know that men or women can fill any role regardless of gender stereotypes'. In school B, a girl's parent commented 'It's as realistic and normal as the other way around would be'. In school C, a girl's mother defended a post-gender stance, 'I was a stay at home mum, but my husband also cooks as do lots of other dads and men they encounter'. In school WS, a mother asserted, 'I don't do house stuff. We have a cleaner for that, or my husband. I taught him to clean when he was twenty and I have not done it since'. The mother had clearly renegotiated the domestic economy in her household, and thereby established an egalitarian balance of tasks. Their statements correlated with the rating scale question, where less than half had challenged gendered stereotypes as Butler (1988) endorsed. Furthermore, their remarks corresponded with the stereotypical perceptions in the children's discussion groups on responsibility for domestic tasks. Most of the girls would bake cakes, recognising the patriarchal demand for subservience; whilst the boys proclaimed that although they could bake cakes, they would only do so for themselves. These differing acts showed the importance of raising the parents' critical self-awareness of cultural bias and alerting them to its impact on young children's behaviour.

I investigated whether parents discussed future roles or aspirations and challenged stereotypical expectations; the evidence indicated it was mostly the parents of boys who did so. One girl's mother in school C placed a glass ceiling directly on any ambitions that her daughter might have with her statement, 'Yes, always follow your

goals but never aim too high'. Her restricting perception is important to note especially as Layard (2020:161) confirmed that children readily identify with, and are affected by, their parents' values. In school B, a boy's parent reaffirmed traditional roles, 'Yes, superheroes help people'; similarly, a school C boy's parent commented, 'We talk about the story and my child is very competitive and always associates himself with a hero'. However, it was competitiveness that concerned the school WS father:

'Where a lot of people get it wrong I find is that they think status is everything...Because a lot of parents, what they do is allow this thing in their head, if I do this with benevolent intent, because I want them to become a doctor, or I want them to become a lawyer, that's not benevolent intent at all, it's because they want it, because it's what they want them to become. It's not what I want them to become, it makes no difference to me if they clean out dustbins or are a banker. The truth is that it's got to be their choice. And as long as they are good people from the heart, that is what matters. That shows me as a parent, I've done a good job'.

I considered how the father's secular ethics was directed towards the happiness principle, as Layard (2020:2-4) described. Distinguishing the context needed for competition and career aspirations and the collaboration needed between individuals, he argued that the best parenting results are when the child desires to act for the greater good - at home, at school and in the local community. He felt that the longing to relate well to one another and for more reciprocal and equitable relationships, leads to a more enjoyable life. I concur with his democratic stance that resists neo-liberalism with the aim of creating the greatest happiness in all our choices, and particularly the least sorrow. His comment indicated how it may be psychologically easier for men to move into gender-neutral areas than for women to access previously male-only positions from which they had been barred.

6.3 Question 2: Which symbolic cultural influences in the fairy tales did the children identify with?

6.3.1 Storytelling strategies

To investigate the storytelling influence on children's gendered language, emotional expression and their approach to reiterative cultural symbols, I asked the children's parents about the different storytelling strategies they used. All parents shared

picture books with their children, whilst only four parents acknowledged that their children used multimedia for storytelling; this raised a discrepancy with the children's responses, where most of them declared having access to multimedia storytelling. A further discrepancy was found towards oral storytelling, with over half the parents declaring they told stories orally, which did not correlate with the children's comments. In school A, a girl's parent reported how they had 'a story of the day – we tell each other what we've done, and even invent story characters'. A boy's parent, an exam board advisor, commented, 'We tell traditional fairy tales orally, rather than through books'. In my oral storytelling sessions, I found that even with the use of props to support engagement and imaginative appreciation, some of the children remained unconvinced that I had told them a 'real story':

G1: Where is that storybook?

G2: I've heard the advert about that story.

The discrepancy between the parents' and children's responses may be because the parents thought they ought to be telling the stories or I was expecting that sort of answer. Emmett (2015) commented that many boys often turned to action-packed digital multimedia because of adult men failing to take sufficient interest in their reading; however, my findings strongly suggested that the girls were using multimedia storytelling entertainment equally. I would suggest that the use of digital entertainment is partly the cause for the lack of quality time being allocated to sharing stories, either orally or reading picture books together, as Maguire (1985:36) found. Crucially, this means that even less time is being given to critical discussion and the development of necessary comprehension and vocabulary skills needed for transformative ideas.

6.3.2 Gendered morality

As Phillips (2011) and Williams (2014) discussed, fairy tales teach us about the danger of conformity to oppressive gendered cultural expectations. They offer a moral counter-world that allows reflection about cultural gendered virtues and right choices, as determined by Foucault (1980), and in so doing, identify opportunities where reform can occur for equality and eudaimonia. To explore parents' views on gendered morality, I included the picture of Molly Whuppie carrying out the king's orders to bring him a giant's purse of gold (Fig. 6.2).

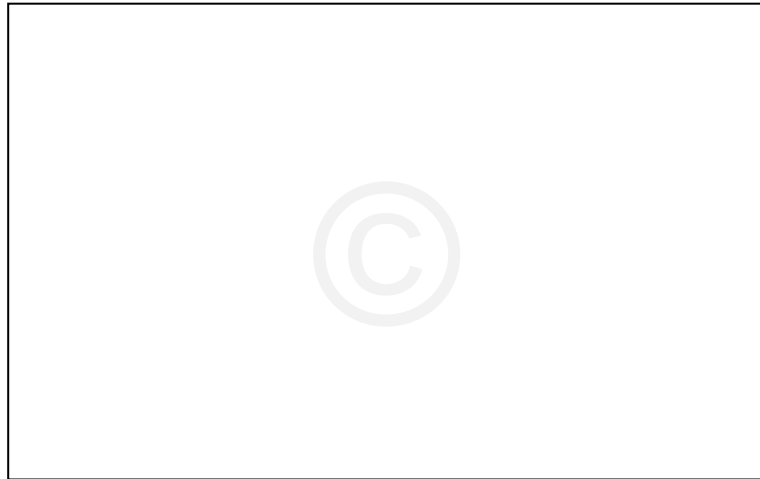


Fig. 6.2 Molly Whuppie stealing the Ogre's purse.

The story contains a gender role reversal of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, with Molly as the heroic protagonist, highlighting a moral hierarchy of needs associated with survival. None of the parents knew the story, and most of them stated that they would not share the picture principally on moral grounds that stealing is bad. In school B, a boy's parent said that she would explain stealing was wrong, but became aware of her duplicitousness due to completing the questionnaire. The mother acknowledged that when she had shared *Jack and the Beanstalk*, she had not highlighted stealing as a bad deed. It can be seen how culturally biased judgements towards different gendered behaviours can often be taken for granted unless self-awareness is raised, confirming Butler's (1988) performative theory about the limited diversity of acts between genders. A girl's parent in school C expressed an unbending dogmatic viewpoint, 'No I would not share it. Stealing is not ok whether right reasons or not, for example, *Robin Hood*'. The school WS parents' thoughts reflected greater empathetic interpretation: 'Maybe nothing is black and white as in real life...' and, 'Yes, in the context of the story'. The WS parents' response indicated the WS philosophical approach to learning with stories, and the appreciation of different perspectives.

6.3.3 Cross-gender virtues

'Lived through' dramatic experiences, as classified by Rosenblatt (1978) and Long (2017), allow children to imaginatively enter into the lives and experience the feelings of fictional protagonists, including those of the opposite gender. The boys were observed role-playing male media story characters, such as Buzz Lightyear from Disney-Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995) and Lightning McQueen from Disney-Pixar's

Cars (2006). A school B parent commented, 'He re-counts stories from Disney's *Cars* with his own toy cars.' Others reported how their sons enjoyed acting as the all-powerful and violent superheroes starring in Disney-Marvel comic productions: *Spiderman*, *Batman* and *Superman*. A school C boy's parent added that her son 'plays jokes like *Horrid Henry*' (Simon, 1994), indicating that the boys are experimenting with how to manipulate power relations through humour in a number of social institutions, as I found in the children's storytelling sessions (Chapter 5.5). A school WS parent recounted how her son would use his dragon puppet to imitate the cat in Donaldson's (2001) *Room on the Broom* by antagonistically saying, 'Buzz off, that's my witch'. The mother described how she too had a puppet, *Penelope Peacock*, with *sparkly* feathers that she liked to pretend to preen. The parent's provision of puppets replicated stereotypical male aggressive and female narcissistic gendered behavioural traits, rather than challenging them or offering alternative ones.

The girls' parents reported how most of their daughters' dramatic play, which Vygotsky (1967) noted supports higher cognitive thinking, included stereotypical performances: 'playing teacher at school', or 'doctor/nurse with a poorly teddy/doll' or 'mummies caring for doll'. I observed that the majority of the parents worked in health and care occupations, thus the girls were mirroring the role models of their parents. The parent of one girl from school C, a dental nurse, added that her daughter engaged in dramatic play, but 'never from a character in a book'; although she had previously stated how her daughter loved princess stories. The discrepancy between the girl's dramatic play and interest in princesses may have been due to her daughter's 'what is' narrative of real-world gender roles that she had experienced. Her action indicated a resigned compliance with the inward reality of her gendered position and future role; similar to the girls in Steedman's (1982) study.

Another girl's mother also did not refer to her daughter role playing any story characters, rather, she enjoyed acting as a traveller; this response correlated with the interests of this child during the storytelling discussions. She commented how she had read with her daughter Valentine's (2014) *Marmaduke the Very Different Dragon*, a story which demonstrated alternative behaviours that the girl was reflecting. Although the mother was an IT analyst, who had ventured into a traditionally male dominated field, she did not actively confront gender stereotypes in stories nor discuss any future roles or ambitions with her daughter. Despite the

more progressive experience of real-world gender roles, contradictory traditional story messages were being shared. As Foucault (1980) argued, power masks itself in resistance, and is rarely overcome but reinvests elsewhere. Furthermore, it should be noted that the book's title was positioned from the male perspective. Paley (1990) and Lee (2016) believed that the value of storytelling was that it helped children to explore and change roles, and form lines of connection between themselves and communities they belong to. This raises the question of self-identification and the effectiveness of the alternative role models, and the need for stronger and more relevant ones for growth and change to truly occur.

6.3.4 Happily ever after?

The archetypal phrase 'happily ever after' is a valuable fairy tale device for signifying growth towards wise rulership, to overcome tribulations and strive for a resolute sense of celebration (Philips, 2011; Williams, 2014). In school C, one boy's parent supported Bettelheim's (1991) reflection on the old art of storytelling with joyful endings, and declared that she would not really want to read those with sad endings. Her response indicated how she was unwittingly limiting her son's experience to 'soft' emotions and censoring those, such as sorrow or sadness. Another boy's mother wrote how her son worried about witches looking after him if something was to happen to her. Her son's fear reflected the beginnings of the emotional dependency and vulnerability that men can develop upon women, due partly to the male cultural emphasis on the ethics of justice over relationships, furthering Gilligan's (1982) research on the gender differences in moral development. The boy's emotional distress illustrated the benefit of critical story discussions to address the 'what ifs' and to encourage emotional resilience through spectatorship in a safe context. A school WS girl's parent stated, 'A happy ending is everybody's dream, but not always a reality'. Her response perhaps arises from her own 'what is' experience, reflecting Dawkins' (*cited in* Knapton, 2014) warning, that the fantastical elements of fairy tales can lead to disappointment in the world of reality. Pullman (2017) contended that often all we have to go on is belief and trust, particularly in our dealings with people and it is our experience which guides us. In school A, one parent simply focused on the authenticity of the stories, differentiating between the reality and fantastical elements and explaining to her son that the stories are not real. This approach can hinder a child's ability to understand the world and imaginatively consider alternatives, which Iser (1980) and Rosen (2018) discussed is a benefit of stories, as regarding perspectives and role models. A

school B boy's parent's comment reflected reinforcement of docility by her tactical avoidance of confrontation, 'He doesn't question these endings, but then we very rarely read stories with these endings'. Similarly, a school WS girl's parent reflected a passive response to stories, 'No. I don't tend to discuss unless she asks us. I'd rather let the story sink in'. One parent contemplated the valuable expansion of stories and imagination, extending Weiss' (2008) discussion of difficult issues and sanitisation, with the example 'Yes often, especially what happens to Christopher Robin after he's left'. Contradictorily, in the rating scale question later she recounted that she did not discuss alternative endings, indicating the mechanism of social power wielding through passive gendered conformity, as Foucault (1980) discussed.

6.4 Question 3: How did the children critically respond to alternative gendered role models and acts?

6.4.1 Misjudgement from appearance only

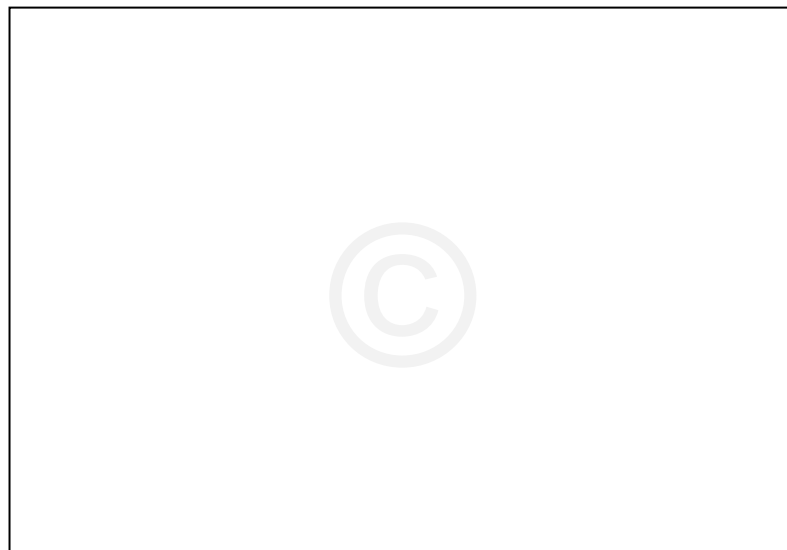


Fig. 6.3 Prince Ronald furious at Princess Elizabeth's appearance.

The *Paper Bag Princess* illustration signifies the subjugated position of femininity by patriarchy, where value is attached to physical appearance (Fig. 6.3). As Foucault (1980) discussed with regard to biopower, knowledge is far from neutral, the understanding of normality and acceptability are structured on the types of bodies that are desired by society. I was interested to explore how the parents responded to the cultural expectation of bodily perfection. In comparison to Davies' (1989)

findings and this study's children's responses, which showed that they agreed with the prince's objection to Princess Elizabeth neglecting her appearance, three-quarters of the parents asserted that they would *never* share the picture with their child. Those who consented would do so only with an explanation that the prince was being shallow and not very nice, or, as one parent simply put it, 'a pompous git'. In school B, a girl's mother responded to the patriarchal subjugation by saying, 'I don't like the message of a man being annoyed at how a woman dresses'. The parents' rejoinders mostly reflected a defiant resistant stance to the patriarchal control and domination of women's appearance and bodies, compared to the conformist positions of their children. A school WS mother reflected, 'It doesn't really matter what we wear if we're clean and tidy and look after our clothes well'. Her reflection focused on personal well-being rather than patriarchal ruling, again revealing the benefit of philosophical storytelling approaches.



Fig. 6.4 A beautiful princess disguised under an ugly donkey skin.

Foucault (1980a) explained that the discourse of biopower contains the ideology of individual responsibility for maintaining good health, and that the unfit body was deemed as ugly and unvirtuous. I thus reflected on Hains' (2014) study about the communication of beauty stereotypes presented to young children, which have been capitalised upon by powerful marketing such as the *Disney* princess culture, by gaining the parents' responses to the princess subversively cloaked in the ugly donkey skin. The parents were unfamiliar with *Donkeyskin* (Fig. 6.4), although this time they indicated that they would be more agreeable to sharing the story, with the proviso that it would depend on the story context and if it was a *real* donkey skin. In

school B, a boy's parent added, 'I'm not sure that he would understand this'. This is significant especially due to another parents' note on how her son at the same school was concerned about his physical appearance: 'He wants to be fit and strong like a hero'. Her remark confirmed Hassall's (2018) report that 'bigorexia' is becoming increasingly common amongst boys to enhance their biopower and their social status. Following Mallan's (2009) warning, as narcissism becomes more prevalent, children will understand less about real life problems and the need for empathy, and they will sacrifice their agency.

When I probed further as to whether parents critically discussed characters' appearances, a school B boy's parent wrote that she would, but 'not necessarily the portrayal'. In school C, the girls' parents stated that they would talk about the significance, perhaps indicating the greater pressure women and girls feel requiring to appear 'perfect': 'Yes, beauty can be mistaken for kindness and ugly for opposite, but this is often untrue'; 'Sometimes – to look scary, cloaked half over face etc., or open and fresh faced for kindness'. One boy's parent made a comment about inner beauty, 'Yes. Princesses are always beautiful to reflect a radiant personality. But I always say that is the kindness/cleverness which is of more value than being pretty'. It was interesting that in this school I found that some boys expressed alternative perceptions to gendered appearances and worth. The findings revealed it was often the girls and mothers who are escalating the pressure upon themselves, and that critical story discussions provided the opportunity to investigate these implied stereotypical biases.

6.4.2 Non-traditional gender role within the family

Butler (2010) argued that compulsory heterosexuality existed to support patriarchy and any deviations resulted in consternation and othering someone as different. I thus presented Browne's portrayal of patriarchal justice for those who make non-traditional choices (Fig. 6.5), describing un-nurturing women as witches. This judgement followed the Brothers Grimm example to erode the notion of a mother not wishing to fulfil the patriarchal desire to be the main child-carer: with the subversive feminine role model shamed by being placed behind iron bars as a warning to others.

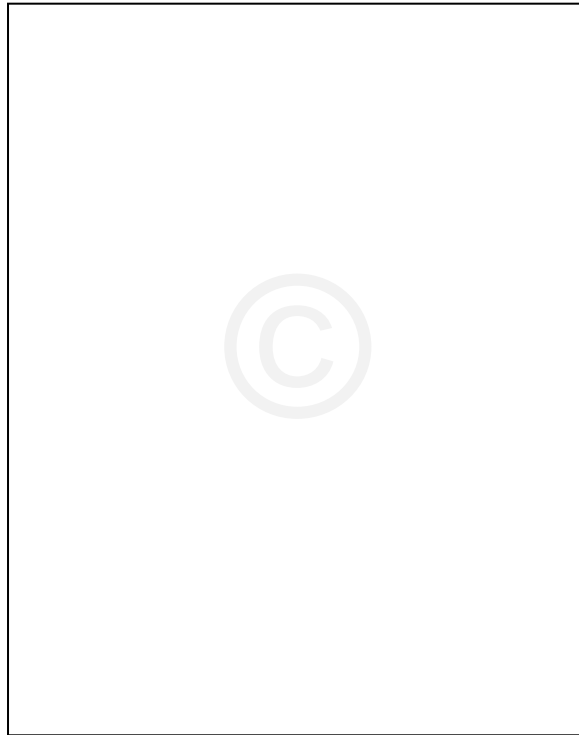


Fig. 6.5 Wicked stepmother or witch ...behind bars...

Most parents revealed misogynistic bias and a lack of empathy towards her position: 'Yes, bad people get punished'; 'Yes, just and fair'; 'Where she belongs'; 'No, justice is done, but my daughter is sensitive'; 'The story doesn't appeal to me'; 'Evil gets what it deserves'. As Bruner (1990) affirmed, metaphorical images can reveal the cultural beliefs and assumptions to be examined in order to challenge the naturalism of oppressive stereotypical roles and to appreciate diversity within genders.

6.4.3 Scarcity of resources on diversity

This research discovered that parents' traditional views are still flexible even later in life, despite the closed responses above. Most parents did reply that they would be open to stories with alternative family structures and roles, although it would not be a criterion for choice. As Okin (1989) explained, the entrenched gender roles in traditional families are responsible for perpetuating significant gender inequalities in the home and workplace. One school B boy's parent clarified, 'Yes, although I don't think we have read any yet'; another school C boy's parent, a family support worker, reported, 'Yes, although they are hard to find'. Their limited provision of alternative story experiences confirmed Pullman's (2017) reflection on society's continuing latent resistance to undesirable non-conformist family structures, contributing to

their invisibility. Interestingly it was the school WS housewife who was extremely positive towards learning about different possibilities, 'Yes, it's great to portray different lifestyles of different people', as was another WS parent, 'Sure, we often talk about it anyway, especially if things like that happen among us'. In confirmation, I had found that the girls were open to discussing appearances that were ambiguous or different to cultural expectations (Chapter 5.4.1). One boy's parent was much more reserved, just as the boys had been in their observations, 'At this moment he understands that there are non-typical families, but doesn't bother him much'. Similarly, another boy's parent commented, 'Not against particularly, but not usually'. Extending Rogoff's (2003) claim that unless oppressive patterns are highlighted, they will be regarded as preferable and slow to change with frustration and resentment occurring.

6.4.4 Lifestyles and eudaimonia

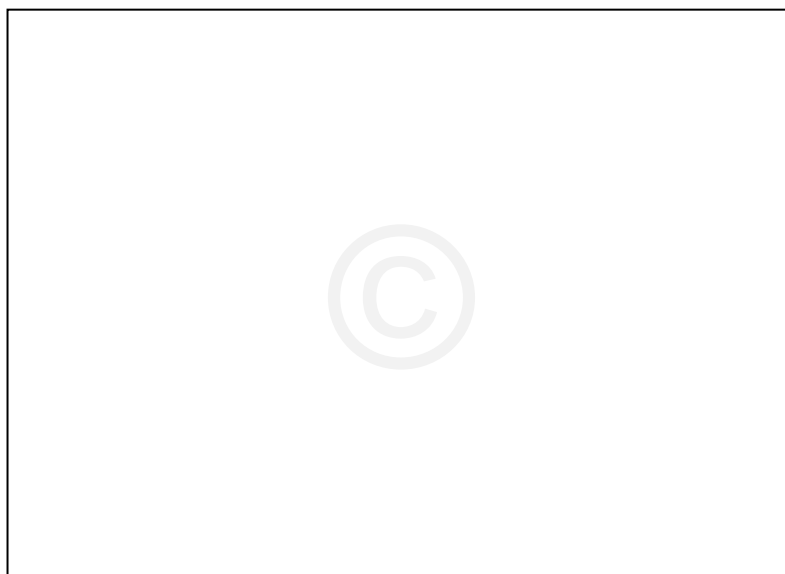


Fig. 6.6 Choosing singledom over marriage.

To investigate whether parents embraced gendered independence and agency in contrast to subservience as decreed by the Butlerian heterosexual matrix, I included the picture of Princess Elizabeth, symbolising empowerment and freedom of choice (Fig. 6.6). Most parents in schools A and B, declared that they would avoid discussing these aspects as they considered their children too young, unless their children brought it up; as a girl's parent conjectured 'Yes, wouldn't mind this one, but wouldn't encourage singledom over marriage'; revealing deeply ingrained and closed stereotypical views. In school C, the parents were generally happier to

embrace the ambiguous scene with no closure to the princess's character arc, as one girl's parent remarked, 'Yes, a refreshing change to typical fairy tale endings'. A boy's parent speculated how her son was aware that people chose different lifestyles, and the children reflected these views in our discussions on gendered power relationships.

6.5 Question 4: How did the research participants respond to a gender-neutral storytelling approach?

6.5.1 Reconstruction of gendered norms

Paley (1990) believed that using storytelling strategies opened up possibilities for developing self-determination, agency, subversion and social mobility. I thus investigated parents' active involvement with libraries, story festivals or drama groups to expand non-stereotypical expectations with their children. Only two parents from the state schools acknowledged that they took their children to libraries; one girl's parent reported that she took her daughter weekly, whilst one boy's parent disclosed how they had joined reading initiatives held over the school holidays. A boy's parent at school WS explained that they would often draw out a book from the *Wild Series*; 'It's about spies, young children spies, eleven years old. And they work for a secret organisation called 'Wild' and they go and help wildlife out in various countries, in various different types of scenarios'. Another parent commented how they often searched for her son's favourites on their visits, such as Armitage's (2013) *Blow the Flag and Wave the Whistle*. Generally, it was evident that the parents of boys visited the library on an *ad hoc* basis and were promoting stereotypical efferent interests, as determined by Rosenblatt (1978), and I had done (Chapter 5.3.3). I was surprised to find that the parents' use of libraries had declined, even from when I had conducted my pilot study two years previously. In response to parents being active storytellers or contributing to storytelling platforms, only the Television Production Manager was recorded as doing so; one parent remarked that she had not been aware that they even existed.

6.6 Chapter conclusion

This study found that parents were generally not concerned with gender stereotyping in storytelling. The results extended Wohlwend's (2012) findings that fairy tales can perpetuate ongoing cultural disparities, and showed that the books shared with children mostly reflected their mothers' preferences with stereotypical role models and expectations rather than emancipatory ones. These findings

highlight the need to accommodate parental perspectives as a shift in deeply engrained stances can cause internal conflict and turmoil with the risk of an outright rejection of the alternative message. None of the parents were familiar with some of the alternative leading female protagonists used in this study: *Molly Whuppie*, the princess from *Donkey Skin* and the *Paper Bag Princess*. Favilli (cited in Saner, 2017) argued that when young girls never see anyone of their own gender making the headlines or being the heroic protagonist in a book or a cartoon, it becomes more difficult to imagine yourself aspiring to become a leading figure or in an honoured position. Emmett (2013) contended that the books chosen by women are likely to reflect their 'softer' tastes over harder ones for their boys to actively engage in; consequently, boys are being deprived of stories with roisterous, reckless heroes, the perils of battles or technical details about fictional weapons that they enjoy. Emmett's conformist argument followed traditional cultural desires, as Foucault (1980) conjectured, whereas Foy (cited in Flood, 2018), the publisher of *Stories for Boys Who Dare to be Different*, promoted the visibility of positive inspirational male role models that help rather than harm others. This study argues that publications such as Foy's, are urgently needed to broaden the attitudes of young boys, and provide a humanist form of egalitarian liberalism instead of patriarchal dystopia.

These results showed how most parents did not reflect upon the meaning of 'happily ever after' or the extension of stories to allow for different possibilities, as Weiss (2008) advocated. Most parents' responses indicated the children's preference for illustrated stories over those told orally, even those from the WS kindergarten with the oral storytelling ethos. The two parents who were wary about the prevalent pink princess culture amongst the girls, resisted in a stereotypical manner by avoidance instead of through critical discussion about gender imbalance. Their limited resistance supports Foucault's (1995) argument which suggests the power of the desire for cultural conformity acts to suppress alternative social actions, successfully creating self-regulating docile bodies. Surprisingly, this study discovered that it was a father rather than the mothers who considered an alternative utilitarian and democratic understanding in comparison to desired traditional positioning. His main focus was on his children's happiness and their reciprocal obligation to others, as Layard (2020) defined: to create a society where people feel a duty to help through the creation of 'the most happiness that we can in the society around us' (op. cit.:4).

This research highlighted that the parents considered the political rhetoric, that gendered equality and emancipation had been achieved to be true. However, the traditional or quasi-traditional division of family labour was evident in the responses received, supporting the heterosexual matrix that Butler (2010) contended. This study highlighted the discrepancy through the mother-only replies to the questionnaires indicating that they were still predominantly the main carers of the children. In response to the traditional ideology, Okin (1989) called for fair equality of opportunity and family justice. She believed that only by instituting these principles can the traditional gender-structures that disadvantage women, both inside the family and in the public institutions, be minimised or even rejected. In doing so, this would enable young women to have a greater choice of entering challenging careers, even those which are least compatible with taking on primary parental responsibility. Okin's message continues to be relevant, even though a range of professions were found amongst the mothers suggesting that while career opportunities were broadening, non-traditional scientific and engineering fields were still notably absent.

This study illustrated that the mothers rarely expanded or prioritised progressive or alternative roles and acts. Okin (1989) advocated that fairness requires a complete sharing of roles by the partners within both the private and public arenas. She considered that even if an agreement was made along the lines of traditional gendered roles, the problem of disparity in career assets would remain at the heart of the conundrum concerning gender and justice in the family. Career assets being the human capital possessed by an individual, such as performance, work status and energy to donate to career development. Gender norms need to be challenged both within the home and within institutions as Ferguson (2016) argued and these are what shape decisions about education, careers and childbearing, and continue to perpetuate patterns of gender inequality.

As role models, the parents' careers did have an influence on children's perceptions of gender acts and aspirations, as found during the storytelling discussions and follow-up activities. Okin (1989) believed that if only traditional divisions of labour are presented, then girls anticipating their role in the family are thus conditioned not to invest as much capital as boys. The desire to adhere to the patriarchal feminine role in a discriminating labour market leaves them asymmetrically vulnerable, due to reduced earning power and less leverage in family decisions. This shapes the structure of the gender system favouring men with opportunities, and the availability

of power to sustain these advantages. The inequalities between the sexes that exist in the family and in the work place reinforce one another; children need to be encouraged to critically question divisions of labour. This study noted that although the parents' views were complex and ambiguous with misogynist perceptions about women's roles, they did indicate a potential receptiveness to holding critical storytelling discussions with their children. It became evident that the WS parents were more open regarding gender positioning. It is possible that their own inherited cultural attitudes, perhaps combined with the educational philosophy of the Steiner schools, might have influenced their thinking. This aspect of gender awareness could certainly be an important area for in-depth future research.

To challenge stereotypes and traditions without becoming corrosive, parents would need to be shown the importance of open dialogic questioning. They could be encouraged to join in storytelling activities in the local community and contribute to any online story blogs. This study argued that parents need to be shown how symbolic language can be used for building egalitarian relationships, and for making independent decisions and choices. For, as Okin (1989) contended, to have a just society, social institutions, such as families and schools, need to be founded on the virtues of fair participation, justice and reciprocity. Only when fairness is achieved, will children develop a sense of justice needed for gender equality.

7 Teachers' perspectives

7.1 Teachers' questionnaires and interviews

Questionnaires were given to and received from all the teachers whose classes were participating in the study (Appendix 5). These were followed by semi-formal individual interviews using an interview prompt schedule (Appendix 6), except for school C where the two teachers were interviewed together due to timetable restrictions. The teachers were female, with one male placement student. Teachers A and B were Reception teachers; Teachers C1 and C2 were Key Stage One, Year One teachers and taught parallel classes in the same school; Teacher WS1 was a fully qualified WS kindergarten teacher and Teacher WS2 was partially qualified. All WS teachers study anthroposophy, devised by Rudolf Steiner (Steiner, 1996), and its implications for the spiritual processes of human development and the education of the child. Student WS3 was a placement student from a German WS School. Teacher WS1 and Teacher WS2 were mother and daughter; both had partial hearing and Teacher WS2 was dyslexic. The age group of the research participants ranged from 16 to 64 years old.

7.2 Question 1: Which dominant discourses did the children raise concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations?

7.2.1 Favourite stories

In response to the questionnaire, both the mainstream and WS teachers revealed they had loved fairy tales as young children. Interestingly, Teacher WS1 included alternative and positive female protagonists in her list of childhood favourites; Spyri's (1881) *Heidi*, an empowering story of an orphaned Swiss girl who learns to take on challenges with a good heart, and Andersen's (1845) *The Matchstick Girl*, a story of a homeless, dying Danish girl's dreams and desires.

When sharing stories with the children, Teacher B mentioned Dickens' (2007) *Usborne Illustrated Fairy Tales*, similarly following the publisher's out-dated stereotypical gendered suitability as the parents had done. The WS teachers listed mostly traditional fairy tales, including *Star Child*, *The Little Straw Broom*, *Cook Little Pot Cook* and *Briar Rose*. Teacher WS1 added, 'Our drawing on fairy tales is almost like drawing on the soul pitches we're creating all the time'. The WS story philosophy dismisses Locke's (1693) passive notion of *tabula rasa*, instead children

are regarded as human beings with intention and great potential. The teachers' time is primarily dedicated to discovering each child's individualities, and supported by their staff meetings, which are viewed as the heart and soul of their pedagogy (Steiner, 1995:62;118).

From the teachers' selection of contemporary books that they shared with the children, Donaldson's (2007) *Tiddler*, the storytelling fish, was extremely popular. Teacher WS2 listed Beskow's (1990) *Peter's Old House*, which focused on individual autonomy within a collective community. Student WS3 listed Disney-Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (2003), as had one of the girls in this study, reflecting the powerful influence of Disney's dominant patriarchal interpretation of the Northern European storytelling culture. Un-stereotypically, he mentioned princess stories, reflecting a progressive post-gender cultured response, empathising with the characters' challenges rather than their gender.

In the state schools I found that the teachers' experience and choice of stories contained mostly traditional stereotypes, supporting the function of the heterosexual matrix as Butler (2010) determined. The WS teachers and student had enjoyed a mixture of stereotypical and non-stereotypical characters as children, and chose to share both of these in the kindergarten. Hinsliff (2019) reported that publishers and filmmakers are following a similar direction.

7.2.2 Story selections

All the teachers directed their choices of stories towards topic work, but they also linked them to the children's current interests. They believed that doing so pulled children into their learning and helped them to become more engaged, extending Rosen's (2018) observation. I found that the contemporary topic stories mentioned by Teachers A and B were mostly about boy protagonists, so encouraging the association of traditional fairy tales with girls. By favouring the boys, the female teachers, as the girls' role models, were covertly teaching them to do the same.

Teacher A recalled that they had covered dinosaurs that half-term:

TA: We did *Harry and His Bucket Full of Dinosaurs* (Whybrow, 2003) and all children have been interested in it. It's a winner with most children, but it's also very much stereotypically something that boys would tend to like as well.

As McCabe *et al.* (2011) advised, thought needs to be given to book titles to reduce the possibility of gendered prejudice and feelings of entitlement. A popular title was Sharratt's (2006) *Don't Dip Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly*; it should be recognised that the title still bore a cultural warning to curious girls, although wrapped in humour. This humorous approach can be an effective discursive resistant strategy (Foucault, 1980), which I found the children were beginning to use in the storytelling discussions (Chapter 5.5).

In school C, the teachers' book selections were determined by the school's concern with lack of progress in boys' reading compared to the girls' reading. The cultural focus on boys' achievements reiterates Clarricoates' (1978) classroom findings from over thirty years ago, that boys and girls are encouraged to work academically but for different reasons. The boys were expected to aspire for success and achievement, whereas girls were expected to accede to the teacher's mandate of compliance to enable her to concentrate on the boys. This study found that continuing cultural sanctions on girls and their conformity to institutional expectations and diligence in achieving them, as Clarricoates' (1978) highlighted, paradoxically created a negative influence on the teachers' perceptions of their intelligence. I noted that teachers regarded the girls as less bothersome but less inspiring, thus less imaginative and intellectually inferior to the boys, extending Bian *et al.*'s findings (2017):

TC1: We tend to plan topics that cater for boys and girls because we've noticed a big gap, especially in the writing, between girls' and boys' progress. So, as a school we've tried to plug the gap and focus more on boys' topics so dragons and dinosaurs and Coventry Cathedral. So, there will still be the girls' fairy tales, but then having an even mix. And our planning, on our literacy overview, we highlight where we're targeting boys as well.

R: What about the girls? Are they expected to just 'fit in'?

TC1: Mostly, I would say. But then we have things, like this time, we've just done *Cinderella* and fairy tales and we do *The Bog Baby*. So, there's quite a mix of girls and boys. Because what we found previously is it's quite girl orientated with the fairy tales so we've tried to change things.

TC2: No, so it's hard; it's difficult. But I let mine bring in their own fiction books now for like an end of the day story and interestingly enough, actually, it's been all girls so far who have brought their books in. Not one boy.

In the school C group discussions, I did find that a small group of boys were non-stereotypically enthusiastic about reading and in their ability to read, in contrast to Emmett's (2015) concerns. The stories chosen portrayed traditional feminine roles, encouraging domesticity and nurturing, with the desire for a harmonious relationship with status. As Phillips (2011) reasoned, the moral of the original *Cinderella* story was not to accept things as they are. *Cinderella*, whilst not as forthright as *Donkeyskin*, showed how a lack of assertiveness can result in harmful effects, whilst assertiveness and independence are rewarded with individual autonomy and agency. These stories' empowering messages were not critically reflected upon in the teachers' recounts of storytelling discussions, allowing patriarchal oppression to continue as 'natural'. I argue that boys and girls need to be presented with extraordinary females in minimally sanitised stories to increase familiarity and equal acceptance of virtues and skills of all genders to prevent marginalisation. Occasionally the title and content of story books can appear to be gender-neutral, such as Teacher B's choice of Aardema's (1981) adaptation of *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain*. An oral folktale originating from Kenya, Africa with a young herd boy as the male protagonist, the revision was still structured around traditional gendered roles and teachers need to be aware of this historical hidden bias, as Kristeva (1980) emphasised.

The boys' addiction to digital media for both storytelling and gaming, such as *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), was evident through their drawings (Appendix 11) and lack of interest shown in picture books outside the classroom. I observed that none of the teachers mentioned any multimedia storytelling applications, even for their personal story purposes. Their lack of familiarity and unease with digital technology reflected their own biased perceptions about biology and intellectual parity; extending Saini's (2017) findings on giftedness, by demonstrating a dependency on male counterparts. Furthermore, building upon Bian *et al.*'s (2017) research with the early emergence of gender stereotypes associated with high level intellectual ability, this study showed how Information Technology is a field often perceived even by teachers to draw upon superior 'male' aptitudes and skills. The challenge for female EY teachers is in not passing these limiting perceptions on nor to encourage girls to create glass ceilings of their own.

7.2.3 Censorship of delivery

With regards to the understanding and growth fairy tales evoke, Bettelheim (1991) explained that censoring disempowers children's ability to learn that fears can be conquered, and consequently disenfranchises empowerment to triumph over adversity. As with the parents, Teachers B and WS1 stated that they would not share anything too scary, and Teacher WS1 justified how she would purposefully soften the stories:

TWS1: Maybe because they often have some relationship to the themes we're using, so I'll tell them in a seasonal cycle, I take them out each season and bring... refresh them. And they're gentle stories.... if a child says anything about a story or it is inappropriate because the child becomes frightened, then you might have to adjust the story slightly. For instance, say Little Red Cup is a wolf, he makes friends you know, but then the child goes home and dreams about wolves and doesn't like it. And they come back the next day and you are just about to do the story and they say, 'I didn't like that wolf yesterday. I don't like that'. You immediately have to go, 'Oh gosh, I'm going to change the story'. But it wouldn't be fair to the child to... sometimes... it is usually a wolf that's introduced that provokes a nervous reaction in a child, in a child that's nervous or excitable.

However, as Foucault (1980) discussed, censorship, or repression, does not remove curiosity, on the contrary, it can facilitate and even produce greater desire and new forms of desire. I argue that removing fantastical elements of fear from the centre to the margins of the story, can provide the opportunity for transformative aspects of gender to take its position.

7.2.4 Oral storytelling

In school WS, the teachers shared stories orally with the children following Steiner's (Steiner, 1996:25) teachings rather than using picture books (Chapter 3.3.1), as Teacher WS1 explained:

TWS1: We don't share pictures. We tell stories that we have learnt so the children can form their own picture/representation of the stories we tell. I used to show the picture and tell the story, but generally, that's frowned upon because it's very important when you tell a story that the children build and imagine a picture in

their imagination. A unique picture to them and that is never... you know that's appropriate to their... them. Whereas if you allow them to develop their inner pictures, they also develop their own imagination and their own human development is much stronger.

This oral storytelling approach could enable the children's perception of the stories and their gendered identity greater flexibility and fluidity as Butler (2010) supported. The teacher's emphasis was in agreement with Wells' (2009) findings on the importance of symbolic representation and the development of the imagination. Following the Steiner approach to 'not awaken independent judgement too early' (Steiner, 1996:37), the WS teachers could not do what I carried out in the state schools; that is to say, use the challenging discussions and story book illustrations to invite a critical examination of gender.

7.2.5 Cultural expectations

To explore whether the teachers identified with normative or progressive gendered expectations, their observations of how stringently the boys or girls governed themselves were investigated:

TC2: I don't think they are stereotyping themselves, no. For instance, yesterday, we were making a card and I'd given them different colour bits of paper and I let them choose and most of the girls did choose pink but one of the boys chose pink as well and so we were like, "That's fine. You can choose pink. Pink is a neutral colour. Anybody can choose pink; it's not necessarily for girls."

TC1: I think other things influence them as well, don't they, over their own choice. So, like at home, if things are always bought for them that are pink and they're a girl, then they might naturally go towards the pink things, whereas if it was their own choice... like I've got a girl in my class who really loves playing with cars. That's absolutely fine.

In the storytelling activities, I did find that there were gender colour connotations as witnessed when none of the boys in the school C groups wished to act the role of the pink dinosaur in *Zog*. Butler (1988) observed that gender performances often reiterate heteronormative power relations that render us all gendered subjects.

This study examined whether the teachers enhanced the pupils' ability to reflexively de-construct their gendered value systems and positions to develop a critical consciousness. Otherwise, as Butler (2010) clarified, the judgemental value of heterosexuality limits the acceptance of alternative gendered norms. Teacher A discussed how she simply used a patient and iterative pedagogical approach:

TA: I think very much so in a school like this – your white, middle-class school. I think in a way you need to do it even more, because those stereotypes are very much alive and kicking. I think it's part of my role to actually talk about them and to challenge them, even at a young age. I do it by if any child said a statement that I thought was really stereotyping either girls or boys, I would say, "Why do you think that? Why do you think that is true?" and then try and give the other side of the story. Because I don't think it's as powerful just to say, "That's not right. It should be like this." I think you need to question them; I think you need to question where it comes from as well, and get children thinking about it and challenging their own thoughts... It has to be a drip, drip, drip approach, but you just need to keep doing that again and again... It doesn't always need any kind of follow-up work; I think discussion is the most powerful thing at this stage, but just to keep returning to.

As the storytelling discussions illustrated, the children varied in their ability to talk eloquently. Allowing the use of different creative media provided opportunities for greater expression, as this enabled the children to communicate in their preferred way. Teachers C1 and C2 highlighted that using different media enabled imaginative freedom and allowed progressive possibilities to be considered:

TC2: Quite a few of my boys actually really enjoy drawing and they will take a lot of time and effort and care into drawing and choosing the right colours, colouring it in and they all think really carefully about it. You can see them adding all these different bits of detail. So that's really nice.

TC1: And it's their imagination as well, isn't it? I know when mine are doing Lego, what looks like a Lego piece to me, I mean, the other day it was a fire bomber that was coming over, then it turned into a house. So, they made up their own little story from this tiny piece of Lego that the boys had built and it was just... whereas I don't think that that tends to happen with the girls. They might make a

little house or something but they wouldn't have that background imagination to go with the creative side, I don't think.

It was evident that the boys were thoroughly 'living through' imaginative story worlds, which were dynamic and exciting (Rosenblatt, 1978; Long, 2017). However, the biased emphasis towards the boys' 'brilliance' was overshadowing the girls' capabilities and creativity resulting in a lack of confidence. The teachers' responses furthered Clarricoates (1978) research into teachers' gendered attitudes and biases showed how these may be implicated in the development of the gender stereotype of cognitive ability:

TC1: But then in the classroom, I would say that in certain subjects, the girls will want my attention a bit more because they might not be sure and they want the reassurance, whereas if I'm talking to the boys, it's because the boys want to challenge.

These results support Abdelmoneim's (cited in Hoyle, 2017) observations that positive affirmations and equality pledges are a valuable means of empowering children and of counterbalancing restrictive pedagogical practices and cultural perceptions within schools.

7.2.6 Future goals

To investigate the visibility given to post-gendered career roles, achievements and aspirations, the teachers' discussions on 'future selves' were studied. Due to the promotion of caring schemata in girls' development as Gilligan (1982) recognised, the teachers' motives for entering the EY were examined.

Teacher A explained she had followed the role model of her father:

TA: My father was like a teacher and went into the inspectorate, so I grew up with that. I think from quite an early age I decided I wanted to teach, so I think it was through that experience.

Teacher B recounted how she has wished to be a teacher from a young age:

TB: I've always wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember. Ever since I was like four years old. I just always wanted to be a teacher. Yeah. Can't imagine what else I'd do really.

Teacher C1 described how working with a deaf child inspired her to become a teacher, whereas Teacher C2 had followed a mainly systematic route:

TC1: I worked for two or three years, one to one, with a profoundly deaf little girl as a TA. But then when I was there, I watched the teacher and I thought, 'Oh no, I want to be a teacher.'

TC2: I went and did a childcare course... I was Level 3 qualified and I decided to go into teaching, quite straightforward, really.

Teacher WS1 stated that she had turned to the alternative WS educational system due to her daughter's special educational requirements:

TWS1: TWS2 had difficulties in mainstream and went to a Waldorf School and I was just fascinated with what they were doing...I stopped my business and started teacher training.

Whereas, Teacher WS2 first became a voluntary student helper, then an assistant, from which her teaching career followed on:

TWS2: Almost by accident, really, because I just came and... I used to help out when I was at university, when I didn't have a lecture and then I sort of just didn't leave.

The teachers' entrance into the EY sector indicated the powerful influence cultural gendered schema have on individual's choices and autonomy (Butler, 1988; Layard, 2020). As Teacher WS2 explained, I found that the teachers focused on empathetic social roles rather than job roles. Teachers A and B's responses illustrated that the vision for possible future choices can be formed in the early years and the variety of role models influences the next generation.

7.2.7 Male role models

Biddulph (1997) and Skelton (2002) argued for the need to balance the feminisation of schooling, thus I enquired about the teachers' responses to welcoming male practitioners. Teacher C believed they were important, especially for those children who did not have male role models in their lives:

TC1: Especially for the children that don't come from a conventional background; they might not have a male role model at home and I think they'd like to see that in school. I know that when we've had PE, we've had male PE teachers that have come in. It's shown that, actually, PE is not necessarily a girly sport because there's a male doing dance so there's a male helping. And I think that helps things, especially for the boys to see that, oh, okay, if we're doing... like this time we're doing dance and so you've got a male coming in to help and I've got a male who is coming to do something different with me and I think it's good for the boys to see...

Moreover, Teacher WS1 reflected how she had always asked the male placement students to help with building items, such as the compost bin, as opposed to any of the female students. Despite encouraging traditional roles, this informal approach did provide flexible opportunities to establish egalitarian working relationships in contrast to the formal structure of state schools, as Fitzpatrick (2019) reported, and to form alternative perceptions.

7.3 Question 2. Which symbolic cultural influences in the fairy tales did the children identify with?

7.3.1 Perception transformation

To determine how imaginative aesthetic responses were being encouraged in children, the storytelling opportunities provided by the teachers were investigated. Kristeva (1980) discussed the importance of examining the gender attributes and relations encoded within stories to challenge traditional power structures. Teacher C1 explicitly labelled Goldilocks a 'baddie' for being adventurous and not adhering to patriarchal desire for docility, as determined by Foucault (1995). This regressive perception was reflected in the descriptive emotive words she used for *Goldilocks* in the questionnaire: devious, mischievous and naughty; compared to those for *Jack and the Beanstalk*: sly, cunning and brave. It is evident she unconsciously rewarded

Jack's exploits as culturally acceptable, whilst she was less lenient towards Goldilocks' misdemeanours:

R: So, you actually choose more traditional rather than contemporary stories?

TC1: That's what we've done this time because that is our unit on traditional tales and because we all go to the pantomime, so before Christmas, we went to see *Cinderella*, so we've put that into our learning after Christmas and done *Cinderella* and looked through that. In our *Guide to Reading*, we've looked at other fairy tales as well to look for similarities and differences.

TC2: We have also done *Three Little Pigs*, *Red Riding Hood*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

R: Yes, those are good ones, you can critically discuss quite a lot with those, can't you?

TC1: Yes, you can see the similarities and the difference and actually, the Goldilocks is the baddie character, and the effect with the evil queen and ugly step sisters. So, in a way, I suppose that's similar because it's not the male who is the baddie...

TC2: That's right.

Similarly, to the children, the teachers upheld the misogynistic views that male characters were mostly above judgement, and the blame for any wrong deeds was transferred onto the female characters.

Paley (1990) suggested that gendered subjectivity is not passively internalised, but is a learnt behaviour. I found that the school C teachers provided the possibility for progressive aesthetic responses through role play, where the boys were recorded doing a rare gender-swap with the female characters. They believed that the pantomimes presented alternative perceptions, but in fact they were found to overtly exaggerate negative perceptions as evident in TC1's comment about the ugly sisters:

R: Yes, Cinderella is an interesting story, especially as boys can sometimes feel like Cinderella in stepfamily.

TC2: Oh, really?

R: So, it doesn't always have to be the girl...

TC1: Because when we did role play as well, we dressed up the boys as well as the older sisters.

R: That can be like pantomime, can't it?

TC1: Yes, that's right and at the pantomime, the ugly sisters were male and the prince was a female so that was good to talk about with the children, that actually, we don't always have to have a female part playing a female, you know. So, it was good for them to know that actually...

R: And did all the children enjoy that?

TC1: The boys loved dressing up as the ugly sisters.

TC2: Yes, we had crowns and so... like the fairy godmother, boys...

TC1: Getting into the role.

TC2: Allowing them to choose, as well, which character they wanted to be.

R: Do you have much time for role play?

TC1: We put it into our literacy sessions. So, they will re-enact the story or might do it as guided reading follow-up, go and make little puppets and retell the story with your group and act it out because it gains an understanding of their knowledge as well and their comprehension of the story. So, we will try. It's the time, isn't it? That's what we find tricky but we do try to put it into our literacy...

The teachers did not mention how the girls reacted to the role play and the characters they chose, developing Clarricoates (1978) findings on hierarchical gendered preferences. In the questionnaire, Teacher C1 recalled that alongside the puppets and role-play, she asked the children 'How might the characters' feelings change throughout the story?', thereby supporting philosophical and empathetic responses. Teacher WS1 similarly commented upon the use of role-play, but equally supporting the boys' and girls' development of voice:

TWS1: The children performed *The Giant Turnip*, which they've done the puppets for now. And last week Isabelle and Tim said the words together. It was interesting to see that Tim was a little timid in his recitation and not always quite got his words. Isabelle was flowing them out whereas... normally she can be quite easily distracted so it was quite interesting.

The finger puppets the kindergarten children made did not have any faces to identify their gender. Steiner (1995: 22) advised teachers that they should not provide ingenious toys, but those that are unfinished rather than complete or what

others call 'beautiful'. He argued that toys with fixed expressions kills the fantasy as the brain has nothing more to, and deprives the children from pleasure (Steiner, 1996:20). The blank faces allow the children to project and imagine the characters feelings and facial expressions. This symbolising and artistic activity allows the children to create a personal response towards the regulation of emotion. The use of multimedia in this way enabled spontaneous improvisations in contrast to their didactic storytelling experiences with no interruptions, whilst Paley (1990:23) regarded them as the *social art of language* that usually improve and transform the narrative.

In the questionnaire, Teacher WS1 described that to develop a children's understanding of the order and sense in the world, wholesome and creative activities are carried out, such as bread baking, walks in nature, clay modelling, gardening, painting, sewing and singing songs. Learning was believed to take place with the 'head, heart and hands':

TWS1: I think around five and six I would often say to people who I'm training that about that time a concept is or something is observed and it's held and then expressed in a three-dimensional way into, for example, drawings.

In the research sessions I found that all the children responded imaginatively during the storytelling discussions and activities, but in the formal schooling there was less flexibility and time.

The teachers in school C explained how the children's friends played a significant part in the critical discussion practice, *Talk Partners*. This approach can be seen to stem from the importance of building co-operative relationships, originally a culturally female endeavour as acknowledged by Minns (1991). In school C the children did refer to their significant same-gender friendships:

TC2: We're encouraging a child that is being hot-seated to give an answer and say, "Yes, because..." and give a reason why, rather than just yes, no, maybe. We also do things like 'Talk Partners' and things on the carpet, allowing them to share their ideas to a friend before they then verbalise it. It means that if we don't have time, obviously, to ask everybody the question, they've still been able to share it with a friend.

TC1: Yes, and if we are doing it the right way - we've just done *Cinderella* and they'll do lots of talk for writing. So, they'll use their story maps; they'll talk to a partner, they'll then talk to somebody else. So, there's lots of talk. And then it's practising, and for our lower ability we have talking tins...

R: Oh, what are talking tins?

TC2: It's like a little tin that they can record their sentence into. So, they can record it and then play back. So, when they're writing it, it's there.

Friendships are important as they encourage and support children's personal and community identities (Paley, 1990). It was noted that no alternative cross-gendered friendships were mentioned or encouraged. I suggest interests are significant in establishing friendships, and if these are less differentiated by gender then perhaps opportunities to blur the gender divide by educators could occur more naturally rather than by being enforced. As shown, the children valued their friendships and resistance could otherwise arise that may exaggerate the gender dichotomy further. By incorporating stories with children's shared interests, equality across gendered friendships may be established. This would allow for the growth of more authentic and meaningful relationships and the promotion of empathy, instead of condescension and othering as cautioned by Butler (2010).

7.3.2 Alternative virtues and emotions

To investigate whether teachers shared traditional or alternative cultural stereotypes, they were asked about the consideration they gave to them. For instance, male role models critically reflecting upon their privileged gender position, as Flood (2018) mentioned. Teacher A replied that she would encourage the children to imagine different scenarios:

R: Do you allow for that philosophical talk when stereotypes are raised?

TA: I would do it a lot as it arises. It might be if we were doing a certain story, some of the traditional tales that we do a lot, some of those have very stereotypical views, and that would be an opportunity to actually say, 'Do you think that would happen now?' and sometimes to say, 'Does this character need to be a girl? Would the story still be the same if we changed it for a boy?' To bring that into the teaching we do sometimes.

Teacher B's response highlighted her unconscious conformity to cultural stereotypes; her awareness was raised by my questioning:

TB: I have to be honest; I've never really thought about it. I don't particularly seek them out.

Teacher B's uncritical acceptance of gender roles reflected Butler's (1988) theory of performativity, when the position of one's gender is perceived as a natural given. Traditional perceptions can only be disestablished through the presentation of alternative roles, as Stephens (1992) suggested. The teachers in the C and WS schools did not consciously seek alternative roles or behaviours:

TWS1: I don't think it ought to be you should always let the boys want to be the girls or something like that. I think there are occasions when we need to understand the archetype because otherwise things get a bit hard for the child. I think the adults need to understand the archetype actually so that they know how to kind of bring something back into balance if it needs to be.

Docile acceptance and adherence to cultural stereotypes, as TWS1 depicted, can close off the imagination to be creative or to generate alternative roles and egalitarian relationships. Rousseau (2012) cautioned that conforming to social constructions can lead to oppressive servitude and unhappiness, unless confronted in a philosophical manner.

7.4 Question 3: How did the children critically respond to alternative gendered role models and acts?

7.4.1 Bodies and shaming

When considering images of naked bodies similar to those in the *Paper Bag Princess* (Fig. 4.2), the teachers' responses indicated the rising risk anxiety they experience when discussing politically sensitive topics, as I had felt (Chapter 5.5.3). Foucault (1980) argued that in the desire for the perfect body, biopower often operates through the means of a health discourse in scientific terms. As demonstrated in this study, the teachers stated that these topics would probably be covered in a formal restricted context, such as in PSHE sessions. Levine (2002) debated that their fear of children's sexuality shapes sex education, especially with young children. Children are curious about how their body works, but teachers'

approaches of informing inquisitive minds could be a way of avoiding bodies and their disturbing desires. Levine (2002:190) argued that using a pedagogical cognitive method rather than an experiential one, can radically reduce the effectiveness of lessons in getting any message of pleasure across.

Teacher A explained that she often adopted a typical efferent questions and answers approach, and employed it as an opportunity to develop appropriate language and terminology:

TA: We do *the Keeping Children Safe project*. That's when maybe conversations about this come up more. We talk about children's bodies and different parts of their bodies, and we do use the correct terms. Some parents have actually found that quite difficult in the past – they haven't so much this year. So, we've done that.

R: Do you think parents are more sensitive around girls' bodies than boys' bodies?

TA: Yes, I think so, because I think there seems to be this perception that girls are always more vulnerable than boys. I don't know the statistics but obviously boys are vulnerable and especially at the younger age. I think amongst our parents maybe there is, but there is a pocket of people who believe that children of reception age shouldn't actually have to be thinking about certain things, so maybe they shouldn't know the right terms. But actually, that's safeguarding because if children do need to tell me something, they need to be able to use the right terms.

Teacher A reflected on the parents' concern to protect children's innocence and the danger of the childhood trope, which can lead to naivety and exploitation as Rousseau (2012) affirmed. The study found that the children were learning to use scatological language effectively, and I question whether parents or teachers know the extent to which it is used. Moreover, as Butler (2010) contended, spaces need to be created for critical conversations to challenge hypersexualised stereotypes:

TA: Also, I think there are maybe some parents who don't want their children to actually know about the real world and want to keep them sheltered. But I think that actually if it comes up in conversation, I wouldn't flinch. I do think it has to be

said. I would say to the parent then, 'we've had this conversation and this is what we have said.'

The response from Teacher A highlighted the importance of openness and the need to critically discuss sociopolitical issues that children encounter in real life, as Saletan (2011) and Pullman (2017) advised. Performances of submissiveness occur otherwise as shown in the children's discussions, which can lead to vulnerability and abuse. On the other hand, Teacher B argued the traditional parents' standpoint and stated that she would not include stories that involved real world issues as she believed that the children were too young. It was interesting to note that she was a parent herself with two children in the EY. It is these closed conformist views that discourage acknowledgement of sex differences which can often lead to sexism.

7.4.2 Aspects of family diversity

To determine whether inclusivity and an appreciation of gendered diversity and choice were being encouraged, the teachers were asked how they addressed alternative family structures and roles. McLeod (2011) stressed that counter-dominant discursive practice is dependent on the imaginable re-conceptualisation by others. A dichotomy was found within the teachers themselves, both supporting the notion and being resistant at the same time. I noted that the age of the teachers and student did affect their viewpoints. Student WS3 believed that stories needed to reflect various realities to convince children that there were a variety of gendered norms. He argued that different family structures would thus become normalised and inclusive within society, and children would develop a meaningful appreciation of diversity. Senior Teacher A admitted that it was a subject that she generally avoided, although she acknowledged that stories provided a safe context for alternative relationships to be reflected upon:

TA: We more often tend to address it in that way through discussion and when children start talking about something. I think in many ways it's something that we do side-step in a way because it...

R: It's a difficult area.

TA: Yes, some parents aren't at ease with that kind of thing. But it is something... and there are children with same-sex parents in this school now and so it is beginning to become something that is talked about and children just asking.

R: It's developing an understanding, isn't it?

TA: Absolutely. We are changing very much the kind of family units that the children have, and so, yeah, that should be reflected. So, I wouldn't say that I'd had a one-to-one with a child challenging about same-sex partnerships or anything like that. But I think maybe it's something that we do need to do maybe more. It's a really tricky one. That's why in many ways it's better if it does come up in a story because it's much more natural for children.

Teacher WS1 demonstrated subconscious resistance to alternative family roles, adhering to the maintenance of the traditional 'natural' balance. The masked effect of biopower (Foucault, 1980) was revealed through the teacher's indifference to the re-description of gendered norms over hegemonic patriarchal practices. As with the parents, I argue that it is important to appreciate teachers' individual variations as forcing a shift in deep-rooted stances can cause tension and stress. The younger teachers, TC1 and TC2, approached the scenario from a different perspective when considering family matters, for instance around parenting roles:

TC2: We have many children from split and unconventional backgrounds so they need to understand that families aren't always from 2.4 children families. They seem quite understanding, though. They don't tend to question each other; they take it, don't they, at this age? But I think, potentially, as they get older, they will start to tend to question things and...

TC1: And I think it's not the stories, I think it's things like when you come to fathers' day or mothers' day, that's when you would probably tackle those issues and say, 'Actually, it's for a male role model in your life or a female role model so it doesn't have to be a mum or a grandma; it can be any female in your life that's special to you or an adult that looks after you who you want to say thank you to'. So, we probably tackle them on those days as opposed to in stories, I think, would happen.

Teacher B asserted how she treated everybody equally, and only discussed it at a low level with the children:

TB: We just talk about how lots of families are different and we do it at a very low level because they're really little, so their understanding is limited anyway. It's kind of their own experience is we start from them.

Yet, as Rogoff (2003) discussed, recurring family motifs and symbols need to be challenged to develop new gendered language and transformative possibilities.

I observed from the questionnaire where the teachers were asked to describe Hansel and Gretel's father, he was the only character they did not recognise. Teacher B responded by drawing a line through the boxes and another declared that she could not recall the story including him. It was only Student WS3 who answered, which perhaps signified the importance of the father role model to him and ascribed these descriptive terms to him: worry, guilt and bad. These terms highlight how he identified with the emotional complexity the father had faced, but ethically judged his actions in an unprejudiced manner. This is in contrast to the children who idealised him as a benevolent father compared to the authoritarian and sadistic Ogre father figure. It was only in the WS kindergarten where the teacher reflected on the instances of boys' nurturing non-stereotypical role play of caring for the young:

TWS1: I have had times when boys have worn slings for the dolls. You know the slings, the baby slings. So, the doll would be in there to go out and they would walk out with the baby or doll in the sling and carry a sword... The last thirty to forty years what's going to be one of the biggest changes is seeing how the boys weave into their role play domestic situations.

Teacher WS1's comments supported the maintenance of the heterosexual matrix as defined by Butler (2010) due to her indifference to the 'natural' hegemonic masculinity and subjugated femininity, and commitment to equal agentic roles within family structures. Her responses reflected what Davies (1989) and I found with the children, that due to teachers' psychological investment in traditional roles, they needed convincing for any transformation to occur.

I noted that it was only Teacher WS2 who mentioned inclusive training and working with different types of family structures, supporting the findings of the teachers' survey report (Sex Education Forum, 2018):

TWS2: So, if there was some gender issue like, I remember doing on my training about... there were a lot of scenarios about children having same sex parents and in that sort of situation, we may need a story that balanced gender

understandings out a bit more like that. Within the children's play, we say moral building things like, '*Everybody's Welcome*', because you can see it, you know, like for instance, when they build something, they might say, 'Only 4-year-olds allowed in here'. You sow the seeds, for want of a better phrase, amongst the children so that they might grow it.

The kindergarten's *Everybody's Welcome* policy reflected sensitivity to family diversity and the understanding of respecting alternative subject positions in relation to dominant discourses and practices to reduce the possibility of marginalisation of the 'other'.

7.5 Question 4: How did the research participants respond to a gender-neutral storytelling approach?

7.5.1 Truth of equality

When enquiring about the importance the teachers attached to the issue of gender, Teacher A's response reflected the anti-feminist myth that society was already post-gender:

TA: I would like children to understand or have an idea, or maybe it's giving them my idea that I feel that males and females are equal, and hopefully reflecting what as a society we feel – that men and women are equal. Children come in with a whole range of experiences and a whole range of beliefs, obviously from their families. So, for me, I think it's just giving them opportunities to talk about it. There might be differences, there might be similarities, but we each have something to offer and that we are equal. I think that that really needs to be reflected through the range of stories that we give.

As McCabe *et al.* (2011) determined in their study on children's books, in the periods with minimal feminist activism, gender parity decreases and the gender gap widens in literary representation. Teacher A and Teacher B commented on the dominant behaviour of boys in their classrooms:

TA: I think we do have some very strong, very articulate boys who can dominate conversations. Sometimes I will say, 'No, this isn't your opportunity. You are

going to be the listener this time and you're not going to speak', because they could take over in the classroom.

As Gilligan (1982) observed, greater aggressiveness was found amongst the boys, identifying the need for pro-social role models to address toxic masculinity.

7.5.2 Gender-neutral classrooms

To determine the pedagogical approaches used to enhance transformative thinking and encourage positive gender affirmations, references to gender-neutrality in the schools' policies were explored. Teacher B believed that due to the option of free choice and cultural influences, it was impossible to become gender-neutral within the reception classroom. Minns (1991) commented that children often restrict themselves to activities which make them feel secure, and generally these are roles that they have learnt through their previous home interaction. I put forward that gender-neutral policies are necessary to implement an effective whole school approach for equal opportunities across the primary curriculum. Teacher intervention is needed to discuss children's choices with them, and to enable them to experience equal opportunities through storytelling activities they may be denied outside the classroom (Minns, 1991). This point was illustrated by the school C teachers' observations on the boys' *Car and Lego* culture:

TC1: If we're doing free choice activities, if we've got like the building and the Lego, the boys will go and that's when you have to say, "Actually, no, we need to try to..." and that's when you have to give different sanctions then and say, "Actually, we need to sort this so it's fair for everybody," and it'd be the girls who go off and do the colouring and the shop.

TC2: It's mainly more boys that would do like the cars and Lego but some of my girls do go and do that and do go and join in with them. So, it is a mix.

R: And do the boys allow them in?

TC1: Yes, they do, yes, although they might squabble and fight.

TC2: Over whose car is whose.

TC1: And that's not necessarily between boys and girls; it might be between boys and boys.

During free choice time and in the playground, the teachers observed that the girls spent more time talking and identifying with the female teachers, whereas the boys went and played amongst themselves, exacerbating polarised gender cultures.

Interestingly, only Teacher B was able to provide their school's policies: the *English Policy* and the *PSHE and Citizenship Policy*, although no direct reference to gender was made in them. I noted that in the school's *English Policy* no advice was given about the selection of literature to be provided for young children, reflecting the *Reading: Next Steps* (2015) report's ambivalent guidance. Although the *PSHE and Citizenship Policy* contained reference to the school ethos which aimed to promote moral, social and cultural development, there was no direct mention of supporting gender equality and equity. In the school's aim 'to develop a child's knowledge and understanding of the world' and to develop well-being, no strategies were mentioned to critically examine cultural biases and prejudices towards gender stereotypes and roles in order to encourage inclusivity, tolerance and understanding of gender diversity. In the school's *SEAL* (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) teaching programme, suggestions on how to develop empathetic and fulfilling cross-gendered relationships were further needed. I argue that the patriarchal status quo was covertly being maintained rather than questioned. Although the children were aware of some of the future choices they could make, they were also culturally restricted and these could hold children back (Chapter 5.2.2). The school's aim for the children to behave in a socially and morally acceptable way, including towards authority and each other, raised an important consideration for schools: upon which cultural values are expectations being formed and upheld?

In school C, my questioning highlighted Teacher C2's unfamiliarity of thinking in these terms, especially when she enquired what the term gender-neutral meant. Teacher C1 believed that her pedagogical style was gender-neutral. Her enquiry raises a critical consideration about how many teachers do not really understand the full meaning of this term and the training needed (Sex Education Forum, 2018):

TC1: That's what we do here, actually. I think we are very gender-neutral, although we might plan so we've got a fair mix of both. When it's teaching, it's not girls and boys; it's their progress and how we can support them, really, so I

wouldn't say that we do really do that. I think we're quite good at not singling them out.

Teacher C1's response was contrary to the boy-focus choice of stories she was conducting, subconsciously adhering to dominant cultural discourses.

The only time children were separated according to gender was when they went to the toilet, and as Hoyle (2017) reported on Abdelmoneim's gender-neutral classroom study, this was a contentious area for post-gender classrooms:

R: Do you divide the class by gender at any point?

TC2: No, I mean, I do things like, 'Oh, boys, you can go and wash your hands first, then girls. You know, that kind of thing just as a nice quick way of getting them off sort of thing but not in any way in terms of learning or anything.'

Teacher WS2 believed a gender-neutral policy was possible and informed how they took an actively inclusive approach that embraced gender diversity within the kindergarten community:

TWS2: We take an approach that everybody's welcome and the *Golden Rules of Life* kind of thing. The golden rules apply to everyone and are written on the wall... letting them each have a turn with blowing out the candle after story time.

The WS teachers effectively balanced Gilligan's (1982) ethics of justice with the ethics of relationships that enabled a greater fluidity of gender characteristics and roles. Moreover, it was the only school where gender expression was explored, but as Adams (2018) had highlighted, the teachers reported it can sometimes be an uncomfortable and unsettling experience. For instance, although happy wearing a dress at home, a boy became reticent as he entered the kindergarten, wary of the judgemental reception from his peers. His response showed self-awareness and how experimentation with gender expression mattered to him.

7.5.3 Balancing gender provision

To enable the children to develop rounder gendered characteristics for their well-being, how the teachers supported the children's knowledge and understanding of cultural symbolic language through storytelling was examined. In school C the

teachers recounted how they had visited the local library with the children and invited guest speakers into school, most of whom had been male, demonstrating a lack of gender awareness:

R: What other literary role models do you introduce to the children?

TC1: We've done a trip to the library, listened to an author there and we've had an illustrator come into school. Some children don't get the opportunity to go to a library; I think this year we've got another author that might be coming in to speak to them.

R: Do you get a mix volunteering to visit the school? Who do you tend to find comes out to schools?

TC2: Do you know, we've had a mix; my first year, we went to see a female at the library and then we had a number of male illustrators, which was really lovely; we had Korky Paul and it really hooked the boys in. And then last year, we had Giles Paley-Phillips, so another male. And this year, I think it is a female ...I can't remember...The illustrator was lovely because I think children just don't see that the males might not be the 'drawer' and the writer, whereas he, actually... it's really, really good, yes.

TC1: And last year as well, he really hooked them in. I'm trying to think what his book was. His book was about dinosaurs, I think. So, he did a really good session with them in the classroom and hooked them in about how to start a story and start to plan one. So that was good for across both genders, really... really handy.

A disproportional emphasis was found to be given to the boys with the literacy attention politically skewed to favour them as *Lifting Limits* (2018) determined, thus reinforcing the hierarchy of gendered interests. The literary experiences and presentations that are provided influence the way gender messages are understood and interpreted. Stereotypical bias seemed to be as prevalent now as studies in the nineteen seventies and eighties showed (Clarricoates, 1978), and my findings have been correlated by the educators' responses. I argue that due to the underlying patriarchal beliefs and responses to gender attributes, teachers were found to unconsciously act out a 'hidden curriculum' favouring the boys to the detriment of girls and this can create oppressive self-fulfilling prophecies.

To investigate the children's understanding about the world and their ability to imaginatively propose alternative solutions to problems and challenges, the

teachers were questioned about their use of the canonical phrase 'happily ever after':

R: Do you consciously think about extending the social gendered experience about the story and the characters' roles for the children?

TB: I read stories with a social, with kind of a moral message in it. We do use them for that quite a lot. And we use them to base them, to talk about things and extend their thinking about those things.

Teacher C1's reply revealed her passive acceptance of the natural order of things, which often occurs when a system of power claims to benefit the oppressed:

TC1: No, children understand that it is the same in all fairy tales.

Teachers WS1 and WS2 explained that they sometimes purposefully leave the ending of the story open for the children to come to their own conclusions. For instance, they recounted that with their *Treasure Box* story they ask the children to think about what might be in there and leave them with their imaginations to answer the question. It is only through critically philosophising around the stereotypical fairy tale characters and behaviours that the oppressive morality of our own world becomes evident and opportunities identified where reform can occur (Isbell *et al.*, 2004; Wells, 2009; Pullman, 2012).

7.5.4 Parental involvement

When encouraging parental collaboration in storytelling, the teachers were asked about the storytelling strategies they employed:

1. *Retelling*. Teacher A usually selected three aspects for the parents to discuss with their children, and the moral message.
2. *Invitation to read to an audience*. Teacher B offered guidance to parents if requested.
3. *Book Talks*. Teacher C1 placed inserts into the children's reading records to give parents an idea of book talk they could do with the children instead of just reading the book.

4. *Literacy evenings and open days*. Teacher C2 explained that parents are informed about how literacy feeds into everything, and to encourage the children to talk about their learning.
5. *Therapeutic stories*. Teacher WS1 had healing stories available for children's challenging behaviour, such as restlessness, loneliness, being over excitable, bed wetting or children who've lost a parent; 'You know the children get glimpses of the intention of parenthood, enough to know that it's... when a child hasn't got parents, that's quite a difficult situation to be in'.

I observed that Teacher WS1's feminine ethics of care, her altruistic and caring guidance for parents and their children was reflected in her choice of stories that she enjoyed as a child, *Heidi* and *Matchstick Girl*.

7.6 Chapter conclusion

To determine "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?", this study discovered that the teachers gave a greater emphasis to the moral message of stories over the critique of gendered stereotypes. The consequence of this is the extension of ethical directives and cultural prototypes of desired gendered identities which strengthen traditional social cohesion and patterns, as Foucault (1980) suggested. The findings showed that when choosing stories, the teachers aimed to connect the children's interests and topic work together. The research found that positive gender discrimination was applied in favour of boys due to concerns about their lower achievement in reading and literacy (DFE, 2019). Extending Clarricoates' research (1978), the evidence revealed that the teachers' attention to the boys' interests and the wider variety of roles being presented to them, was having a negative effect on classroom culture. With regard to boys, it was supporting their perception of superiority and entitlement, and the macho culture, with the identification of violent behaviour and 'harder' emotions. With regard to girls, this action was negatively influencing their perception of themselves as less imaginative and self-assured, and in some cases even 'dull'.

The myth that gendered equality had been achieved was found to be upheld by the teachers. They regarded the empowering messages in some stories as largely redundant, as illustrated by an older teacher who was familiar with stories such as *The Paper Bag Princess*, but had long since abandoned using them for that reason.

This study identified that the teachers challenged the gender stereotypes only as they arose, despite the dominant and aggressive Car and Lego and The Pink Princess cultures that were reported in all of the classrooms. This research showed that the contemporary stories chosen either contained male protagonists or upheld stereotypical cultural roles strengthening the heterosexual matrix that Butler (2010) outlined. This study demonstrated that the traditional stories and activities performed, rather than transforming negative gendered characteristics, were found to exaggerate them.

These results highlighted the crisis within the EY education caused by a lack of nurturing male teachers, which does not seem likely to be remedied in the near future; especially as the conformist cultural messages were deeply ingrained during the teachers' childhoods and appeared to be self-perpetuating. This study emphasised that these messages are continuing to be passed to the younger generation, with only the girls identifying with the female teachers in the primary sector. The younger teachers questioned the possibility of ever truly achieving a gender-neutral classroom with the option of free choice and the social conditioning occurring outside.

The findings indicated that the traditional stereotypical family structures were being upheld and reinforced by the teachers in their storytelling, although they acknowledged an awareness of the growing diversity of the children's home backgrounds. The results showed that it was the male student who challenged this limited perception which marginalised those outside the heteronormative nuclear household. He emphasised the significance of presenting caring family male role models, and regarded them in realistic terms, as WS philosophy encouraged, free from idealised patriarchal hegemony. My research demonstrated that there was a subconscious covert resistance, and indifference to the re-description of norms by the teachers, reflecting the control of biopower (Foucault, 1980). Their cultural conformity was evident in the lack of the progressive roles being presented and the emphasis placed on the need for the maintenance of traditional gendered balance.

This study argues that the teachers were delivering a highly gender-stereotyped curriculum, because they seemed afraid of embracing gender fluidity and gender non-conformity. Butler (1988) hypothesised that performative acts are types of authoritative speech, which are enforced through laws or norms of society and intuitions, such as school values or curricula. In regard to the notion of institutional

emphasis, Lyotard (1984) stressed that it was the sociopolitical conditions governing gender performativity and the conduct of education. He claimed that teaching was no longer concerned with personal autonomy or agency, but with the skills and techniques that contribute to the maintenance of the internal cohesion and legitimisation of the state. He pointed out that at worst it involved the threat of terror and the penalty of marginalisation, 'be operational (that is commensurable) or disappear' (Lyotard, 1979:xxiv), as the teachers were displaying. This study recommends reflection upon the underlying power and knowledge, and the use of everyday utterances, in the force or effects of language used in constituting normalised and governable individuals. In Lyotard's (1984) terms, children are being socially conditioned, but traditionally not progressively 'from the liberal 'elite' more or less concerned with the great task of social progress, understood here in terms of emancipation' (op. cit.:59). Instead, through highly regulated schooling, gender performativity is being pursued in association with increasingly technological and Foucauldian scientific managerial theories. These pedagogical approaches will promote conformity rather than critical thinking or problem-solving towards broader aspects of behaviour and beliefs, such as gender equality and transformation.

The data determined that awareness and familiarity with the use of digital multimedia for storytelling was limited amongst the teachers, although it formed a significant part of the children's imaginative worlds. Surprisingly, it was only the oldest teacher who was an active user and researcher on digital story blogs and websites, and it was her views that were most alternative. The younger teachers did attempt to expand the children's perceptions by visiting the library and inviting authors and illustrators into their schools. The final finding was that although the teachers provided valuable reading strategies to the parents, none directly encouraged critical discussions or presented alternative gendered role models to develop eudaimonia and well-being. Time allocation was a critical factor for the storytelling sessions to be effective, and the teachers acknowledged that many demands existed already and that they took precedence.

I argue that with the use of particular stories with critical discussions and follow-up activities, it is possible to make inroads into gender conformity with young children. However, for the reasons given above, it is evident that the teachers are not in a position to do this. The teachers in WS school are perhaps in best placed to make change happen, but paradoxically their storytelling approach (Steiner, 1996:97) limits this possibility as they are not able to critically challenge gendered messages or use provocative illustrations from storybooks in the way I did. The next chapter

will discuss how fairy stories with alternative protagonists can be used to effectively challenge cultural stereotypes and oppressive gendered messages.

Recommendations on how to develop critical and gender-neutral approaches for curricula will be suggested to support progressive feminist perceptions.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Where now?

In Chapter 2 the research literature was discussed to examine the study's main question: "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?". This study sought to investigate the areas of gender research in the early years that related to the four research sub-questions that supported the central investigation. First, to determine the dominant discourses that engaged children concerning the associations between gender, culture and power relations. Second, to explore the influence of cultural symbolism and gain an understanding of the power relations that children were identifying with through their language, emotional expression and behaviour. Third, to extend the research on how children respond to alternative and subversive gendered roles in order to challenge cultural perceptions and expectations. Fourth, to consider the participants' responses to gender-neutral storytelling approaches. The findings from these research areas have shown that critical storytelling discussions and follow-up activities with young children can be used effectively to challenge cultural stereotypes and to promote egalitarian relationships.

First, this study determined that young children's ability to think critically and philosophically about their gendered roles must not be underestimated. Through the provision of enriching storytelling experiences the children began to learn how to critically examine their own gendered interpretations of stories. It was evident from the transcript data that they were capable of asking big philosophical questions about life and relationships, as illustrated by a girl's discerning question, 'Can those with power and riches be nice too?' The results demonstrated that the critical interrogation of the gendered power relations and moral teachings in stories can enable children to explore prevailing dichotomous gendered expectations. This was particularly evident in a boys' *Donkeyskin* discussion, in which they expressed surprise and disbelief about girls being discouraged from venturing away from the home, taking their own freedom of liberty and speech for granted. In contrast, the girls voiced a resigned 'what is' rather than a 'what if' about their gender roles, and consequent punishment if they deviated from accepted cultural behavioural margins, as Foucault (1980) discussed.

The research data indicated the importance of using open dialogic questioning, such as 'What do you think?', to develop children's growing understanding of self, in

preference to a plethora of retrieval questions. The results showed that teachers were encouraging dialogical conversations, asking the children to justify their opinions by using the refrain, 'I think this...' or 'because...'. However, due to the schools' standards-driven curricula, in particular the statutory focus on the quantifiable outcomes of children's achievements, the storytelling periods were limited. The lack of time was noted to be an impediment on the opportunity for quality responses, especially with young children who needed longer to formulate their thoughts. This finding had previously been recorded over ten years ago, which indicates the use of mainly didactic questioning is still prevalent with less time for a considered response (Wells, 2009). In the WS kindergarten pedagogical approach, I observed that the storytelling discussions and associated activities created valuable imaginative space for the renegotiation of cultural values and interests, and it was notable that their class groups were smaller. I found that the teachers' reading strategy suggestions for parents were valuable, but non-challenging; the importance of critical listening and discussion around restrictive stereotypes and non-stereotypical alternatives needs parental encouragement to be further explored with children.

My responsibility as the story mediator was to initiate and facilitate critical thinking and questioning: skills that are vital for the development of comprehensive understanding and philosophical enquiry into stereotypes. In contrast to Blaise's (2010) findings on teachers' pedagogy, I did not drown out the children's voices. Due to the varying group dynamics and the gendered focus of children's interests that arose from the critical discussions, I adapted my methods of delivery and language. However, despite being fully aware of gender-conscious approaches, my own cultural perceptions subconsciously influenced my mediation as Jung (1969) had considered. I would suggest that critical self-reflection and reflexivity by practitioners is needed to address this risk. When challenging stereotypical beliefs, the evidence showed that mixed gender groups were only of benefit if there were high levels of adult mediation due to the boys' dominating behaviour. Through my intervention the girls' confidence grew in the mixed groups and they became more assertive and empowered as the sessions progressed.

The research argues the need for the diversity of accessible and admirable role models in stories and in real life, as the results demonstrated that the predominant traditional cultural views of gender hinder career aspirations for both genders. Bousted (*cited in* Fitzpatrick, 2019) contended that stereotypical gendered

perceptions can form an iterative restricting cycle: such as, the belief that men are not meant to work in jobs involving children. Biddulph (1997) and Skelton (2002) believed the feminisation of schooling could be reduced by increasing the number of male teachers and potentially raising the standards of achievement in reading for boys. When listening to the young children, I noted how they already had a clear understanding that male and female teachers were equally skilled and knowledgeable; for these children teaching was about reducing gender bias, broadening experiences for self-identification and establishing egalitarian relationships. In a storytelling activity about their future selves, one of the older boys exhibited a rare cross-gender desire to be a gym teacher. I noted that this was possibly due to the fact that the school had been granted additional funds and had provided specialist PE lessons with male teachers. The male sports teacher had performed as an exemplar and clearly had established a meaningful rapport with the boys. In contrast, I observed that the girls did not share a similar interest in sport, indicating strict conformity to stereotypical behaviours and attitudes. These findings demonstrated how already at this young age, children's receptiveness to alternatives is affected by their confidence to overcome cultural expectations and the desire for patriarchal rewards. Due to the effects of Foucauldian biopower, girls still need to develop the self-assurance to accept they can be competitive and non-glamorous in sport. When I asked the children metaphorically whether they would choose a male or female dragon teacher, the younger children expressed their preference for the correspondingly same-gendered teacher. As a girl commented, she would like 'a nice lady teacher', and the boys stereotypically declared they would prefer a male teacher as 'a male teacher is tougher' and 'it feels like we are happy'. Unexpectedly, the slightly older girls informed me that they 'know there are nice man teachers', and 'the man could work with the girls, and the lady could work with the boys'. They imaginatively transposed the example of Madam Dragon teaching the young male dragons into the reality of their classroom experience, and through discussion collaboratively formed an original gender-neutral approach of their own.

The research found that although the female teachers unanimously had no objections to male teachers joining the EY departments, their practices were mostly based on the traditional gender roles, failing to appreciate the connection between supporting boys and possible future careers in teaching. I explored the motivation behind teachers entering this sector of the profession, and discovered that their choices were mainly derived from the acceptability and expectation by society to do

so. Thus, their career options were a stereotypically 'safe' cultural choice, and a challenge is to ask female teachers to present alternative roles which they have not experienced or undertaken themselves. Even with the progressive attitudes shown in the WS kindergarten, my findings indicate that men have many cultural and peer barriers to overcome when entering gender 'labelled' professions.

Second, this study has significantly contributed to the research on the influence of cultural symbolism on children's perceptions of gender and emotion with a key finding that their use of language was closely associated with gender, emotional expression and physical behaviour. For instance, the multimodal analysis of the evidence showed that masculine language was strong, and feminine language was diminished and understated. The different use of language is an important reason for considering which story stereotypes are presented to children in order to encourage gender-neutrality and reduce hierarchical perceptions.

The study argues that the formation of transactional relationships between the story characters and the children's own life experiences encouraged meaningful aesthetic responses. The use of fairy tales enriched their understanding about the complexity of gender roles and emotions, with the significant recognition that both genders experienced similar feelings even though the cultural emphases were different. Rosenblatt (1938) postulated that 'the student needs to be given the opportunity and courage to approach literature personally, to let it mean something to him directly. He should be made aware that his own response to books, even though it may not seem to resemble the standard critical comments, is worth expressing' (op. cit.:81). The study showed that working in small groups provided this opportunity to enhance the meaningful experience for each child and for cognitive development. Through the use of Harding's (1962) reader response theories that fairy tales provide an imaginative experience of spectatorship, this research indicated how young children were learning to speculate and anticipate, to empathise with the emotional response of others and to express thoughts of wisdom. The results showed that aesthetic engagement was necessary to enable children to create imaginative spaces and to learn about emotional turmoil, such as how abandonment or neglect can cause relational distance and loneliness. Eliciting aesthetic responses enabled covert restrictive gendered messages to be challenged, and encouraged progressive and transformative thought by supporting the creation of something that was beyond the story. The analyses of the young children's conversations drew significantly upon Iser's (1980) theory that story gaps

provide the impetus to imaginatively fill what is not said or shown. This idea was developed in the storytelling discussions when it was shown that they were able to collaborate and build upon one another's ideas to fill the fairy tale interludes as they occurred.

When forming personal connections with story experiences, many of the children were found to do so more effectively through the use of the picture book illustrations than through oral story-telling, as the parent questionnaire data supported. I would suggest this may be due to the strong visual content of the digital multimedia story world which many of the children are engaged with at home, and which constantly surrounds them. The study reinforces the findings of Wells (2009) and Pullman (2017), and argues for the importance of critical discussions to enable children to reflect upon their early story experiences and to extend their own gendered inner narratives. Some of the children spontaneously shared quite long and detailed personal stories enabling meaningful text-to-life responses, as Bruner (1985;1990) and Faulkner (cited in Cremin *et al.*, 2016) predicted. I propose that these individual story connections were supported by the intimacy formed by the closeness and collaborative nature of the small story groups. I observed that the sharing of personal narratives occurred more in the single-sex than in mixed groups. Moreover, in contrast to Dawkins' (cited in Knapton, 2014) protest, it was the power relations and the children's real family experiences that I found caused them anxiety and upset, as opposed to the fantastical outcomes of fairy tales.

The research indicated that sexism is a significant factor both at home and at school. The data revealed that the teachers' and parents' lack of impetus towards requesting support and guidance in understanding gender inclusive practices and their positive implications, was partly due to their belief that gender equality had been achieved. Despite their convictions, only one father replied to my research on gender stereotypes. The lack of interest from fathers supports Okin's (1989) and Ferguson's (2016) arguments that adherence to the ideology of traditional families limits structural change. The interview data revealed that these cultural perceptions of family were held even when they did not apply to their own circumstances, as was applicable in most cases. I suggest that due to the adherence to the Butlerian heterosexual matrix, it was heteronormative expectations of male adulthood which caused a particular father to express concern about his son's future choices and opportunities. To ensure equality and egalitarian relationships in the home and the work place, men's support is necessary to provide role models for boys.

Unsurprisingly, my findings demonstrated that the children were developing a limited perception of gender, their story memories were mostly narrow and stereotypical rather than fluid and multifaceted. The study showed that Clarricoates' (1978) hidden curriculum still prevailed in the classroom with the girls considered to be less innovative by the teachers due to their subconscious cultural bias and complicity to Foucauldian female docility. I demonstrated that the teachers' and parents' priorities lay mostly with the children's literacy progress and with the acceptability of the content rather than issues surrounding gender. These findings indicate the importance of this research, since the strongest messages for children are those that are reinforced by teachers and parents.

Through the young children's participation in storytelling discussions, they began to identify gendered emotions, enabling them to start to develop a deeper empathetic and hedonistic understanding of themselves and others. This growing emotional awareness was evident in the children's identification of Hansel and Gretel's impoverished living conditions, and recognition of the sense of despair amongst the family members. This aesthetic understanding enabled the children to explore the complexity of family aspects, such as the roles of responsibility, care and income-earning, and of egalitarian power relations. Equally, these discussions allowed for progressive and eudaimonic endeavours to be considered, with the boys beginning to express a wider range of feelings necessary for positive self-actualisation, such as feeling frightened or loving others. At the same time the girls began to understand the implications of adopting non-stereotypical behavioural characteristics, such as competitiveness, daring and energy, to increase their autonomy and the value of self-worth.

Third, this study extended the research on young children's receptiveness to alternative and subversive gendered roles in order to challenge their cultural perceptions and expectations. The results showed how the critical re-construction of traditional stereotypes into more gender-neutral figures inspired receptivity and transformative thinking. During the story discussions, the gendered behavioural traits between the compliant passive stance of female characters and the subversive active princesses were compared in order to identify how they achieved autonomy and independence. The children were initially closed-minded, as Davies' (1989) research had found when sharing the *Paper Bag Princess*. Even later, in the *Molly Whuppie* story discussions on the difference between Molly's actions and the 'waiting sisters', some of the girls continued to be strongly resistant to an alternative

gender perception. They still wished to place themselves in the 'waiting' position, and were adamant to do so. To be most effective and to encourage critical cognitive thinking, stories need to be shared a number of times with young children, a strategy I observed that was used in School A and the WS kindergarten. One way of achieving this within class time constraints would be to invite the parents to share the same story with the children to provide a richer story experience. The story could be shared on the school website or class story blog, to engage parents' active interest and to prioritise storytelling experiences.

The research showed that a variety of storytelling experiences are needed to develop young children's imagination and support the transformation of gender roles. Adapting Paley's (1990) use of helicopter stories in a non-judgemental environment, I found that the follow-up aesthetic activities, such as role-playing and puppeteering, enhanced the children's critical experimentation with their gendered sense of self. At the beginning of the sessions, the characters were described by the children in mostly an imaginary sense, but as the story sessions advanced, they began to introduce more of themselves into their interpretations creating a purposeful and meaningful experience. As Rosen (2018) commented, 'Every time a child tells a story in response to a story they've read or heard, they're selecting a common element from both and creating or affirming a schema. It's the first step in abstract thought' (op. cit.:56). The story related activities are an immensely valuable means of extending young children's emotional and 'lived through' interpretations, necessary for the transformation of cultural stereotypes as Butler (1988) advocated. The critical storytelling discussions enabled the children to begin to make more realistic judgements of character, such as with parental figures, through an increased understanding of equitable gendered behaviours and expectations. If this discursive approach was adopted in the long term it would contribute to children's empathetic appreciation of diversity within their own gender and towards others, building more cooperative and inclusive relationships.

Fourth, this study considered how gender-neutral practices and policies were being exercised in the classroom, and showed any advancement that had occurred was mostly due to training and familiarity with such an approach. Of those involved in the research, the younger WS staff were found to hold the most progressive views towards gender roles; the WS male student appreciating 'female' associated texts as well as 'male' ones. Post-gendered understandings are achievable and important in assisting the construction of multiple aspects of identity and the broadening of life

possibilities. A likely contributory factor for the young teachers' non-stereotypical stance was due to the inclusive teacher training they had received and the placement experience for the student. These experiences were reflected in the teachers' attitudes of openness and flexibility towards alternative gender roles and expression amongst the children, such as the acceptance of cross-dressing. The WS kindergarten was the only learning environment where the children's gender-policing was seen to allow more fluidity with their peers and greater exploration of self-identification.

In summary, this study has shown unequivocally that young children are capable of challenging restrictive power structures and making aesthetic connections with alternative perceptions of gender through exploratory discussions. These findings have significant implications for the holistic development of young children's emotions and behaviours to enhance positive, healthy concepts about themselves and empathetic views towards others. These results indicate that children's story interests are strongly guided by their parents' and teachers' stereotypical cultural story choices, and these in turn influence use of expansive and powerful, or diminishing and understating, self-affirmative words. The fairy tale storytelling sessions provided a valuable opportunity for children to participate and project themselves upon the two-dimensional characters, and through intervention, to critically engage with the gender messages contained in the stories. These research findings highlight the significance of the thinking space needed for critical reflection and listening to allow children's imaginative interpretations and responses to form. This study shows how exploration of cultural symbols and gendered characteristics can enhance children's critical appreciation of their authenticity and meaningfulness. Single-sex groups were shown to enable hidden and damaging cultural expectations to be unjudgementally challenged with less adult mediation and scaffolding required. Importantly, the research has shown that young children are able to learn how to become more receptive to non-stereotypical gender role models and virtues, and more resilient against the forces of restrictive and stupefying cultural ideology. In comparison with modern simplified story characters, traditional role models can be shaped or disproved, whilst supporting the formation of alternative or subversive co-creations. Finally, the study highlights that the school's literature on SRE and PHSE policies need to contain reference to the use of positive self-affirming gendered language and emotional expression, parent and teacher mediation and engagement, and the greater provision of aesthetic storytelling and experiential narratives.

8.2 Where next?

The influences of story stereotypes on children's gendered identity and emotional expression were first considered in Chapter 2. It was recognised that critical storytelling discussions might enable the exploration of power relations, investigation of metaphorical symbolism and provision of alternative stereotypes which could contribute to transformative thinking. From the results of the research findings, I conclude with five key recommendations for developing critical and gender-neutral storytelling approaches, and, noting the limitations of the parameters of this study, suggestions for future research.

First, I recommend that greater consideration is given to the ideal curriculum with the balance of gendered characters, multiplicity of virtues and emotional factors possible within each, to challenge both the children and the adults. The protagonists should exhibit some non-stereotypical behaviours to give rounder, healthier and more holistic performances. The alternative leading characters need to be imaginatively accessible for young children, with cross-gender virtues highlighted to reduce hierarchical associations and to increase acceptance. This study found that the publishers' limited range of suitable role models was a significant impediment, and presenting positive unconventional characters is understandably dependent on demand. Due to the decline of traditional oral storytelling and the popularity of multimedia, future investigations could identify commercially viable and progressive gendered models for exploration in picture books, and understand that these models have implications also for digital media production.

Second, I recommend the comparison and discussion of a variety of the different retellings of the fairy tales, from older traditional versions to more contemporary ones. This examination of the shifting social structures that are encoded within fairy tales, as Kristeva (1980) determined, would develop children's deeper understanding of 'power' relations on gender roles. Through sharing the fascinating histories of fairy tales through the ages, the children could be shown how to peel away their layers of cultural symbolic meaning. For instance, this might be achieved by sharing the different forms of *Hansel and Gretel*, and identifying the change in emphasis of the father and mother acts through its retelling. Due to the limited length of this study this aspect was only touched upon with the children.

Third, I recommend that teachers and parents critically reflect not only upon the interests of both genders, but also upon their own cultural gender bias and prejudices. Teachers need to ensure that the classroom story language promotes a universal sense of self-belief, self-worth and independence rather than that of superiority or dependency or of subservience to others. Common themes and interests need to be considered, such as adventure and humour, to endorse equal cross-gendered friendships and to increase children's control and management of themselves, especially in mixed groups. To further the research into the story focus of children, I would suggest conducting a study with a larger sample size over an extended period, identifying children's mutual interests and applying the findings to their preferred genres of story.

Fourth, I recommend that time needs to be allocated for pedagogies of choice to enable meaningful spectatorship and participation, and for children to share their story memories for a greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender and associated acts. Opportunities are needed to support teachers' mediation and children's questions to inspire philosophical thinking and the co-construction of emancipatory ideas. Reformist, democratic gendered interpretations are achievable, as demonstrated by the WS kindergarten responses, hence schools' gender-neutral and equality policies need to be reprioritised and made visible. Cultural taboos and dubious morality, such as nudity, need to be debated rather than censored, or even worse, dismissed. Critical discussions can challenge the pressurising influence of the cultural desire for bodily perfection and of growing narcissistic tendencies. These conversations can counterbalance these restrictive cultural practices by offering the valuable support for the development of empathetic relationships. Great pressure was felt by teachers on this subject, even within a small sample with the same cultural background, so future investigations could broaden the study on critical discussions about gender stereotypes to include a wider diversity of participants.

Fifth, awareness needs to be raised amongst parents about the benefits of critical story talk. This could be achieved by inviting parents specifically to engage in storytelling and informative events. Creative story workshops could be devised, along with recommended booklists and discussion topics that promote progressive attitudes and to support understanding of the gender challenges that boys and girls are likely to face today. This could also help to overcome the issue of censorship

and marginalisation surrounding the controversy of relationships education and SRE within local school communities. The results of the parental enquiries were derived from mainly female respondents, and I would suggest online questionnaires in future could be targeted to reach a broader range of participants, especially males. Different perspectives and ideas could then be shared and incorporated into individual school approaches to children's literature; this would increase the effectiveness and relevance of the enquires made.

Finally, I conclude that this qualitative study has contributed to the limited existing research into: "How can a critical gendered response in young children be elicited using fairy tales?". My research has demonstrated that egalitarian gendered approaches are supported by philosophical discussions concerning cultural ideology, and that having both hard and soft character traits is acceptable. I argue that even if stories of slightly dubious morality are shared, positive cross-gender virtues and values can be identified through dialogic discussion that can contribute to empowering self-perceptions. To enable the continuum of gender to be less polarised and to support eudaimonia, well-being and realistic egalitarian relationships, this study argues that a common understanding between parents and teachers is needed. Working together with the children, the significance of cultural symbolism and transformative language can be examined. This collaborative relationship could allow imaginative and inspirational thoughts to transcend gendered dichotomies and cultural boundaries. Suitably and critically presented, the fairy tale can contribute not only to children's critical literacy, but support a significant enrichment of their understanding of gender. Where this mutual understanding works, there is no stopping progress. Inspiringly, Seeger (2017) wrote: 'In the 2000s, a teacher at my grandson's school is dealing with same-sex relationships. *What do you know about it, children?* My grandchick holds his hand up and says, *My grandma is a lesbian*. That must have earned him Brownie points with his mates' (op. cit.:354).

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10 Appendices

Appendix 1: Pilot study

The aim of the pilot study was to investigate the most appropriate approaches for working with young children to explore their gender identity and emotional expression. In this Appendix I will give a brief account of the pilot study and show how it influenced the course of my present research. Stories were chosen as the basis of the study as they are often used at home and at school to teach children cultural gendered expectations: 'we live in a world that is produced through stories – stories we are told, stories that we recount, and stories that we create' (Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers, 1992:6-7). Foucault's (1991) critical theory, Bruner's (1990) narrative analysis and Butler's (1990) post-structural theoretical reasonings on power, knowledge and discourse were used as a means of identifying gendered power relations and performance, and the possibility for transformations of stereotypical story characters. The pilot study was carried out in a one-form-entry inner-city primary school, in a class with thirty children aged 4 to 6 years old. It involved observing from both emic and etic perspectives the educators sharing stories with the children, how they responded to them and the role or characters they and their peers naturally identified with. I also sought to reflect on the relationships of the children with their teacher and the shared personal characteristics they displayed. In the main study the teachers were hesitant about being observed, but otherwise supported the literacy research with the children, and so I ran the storytelling discussions.

The initial investigation combined the mixed methods of participatory action research and case study to gain qualitative and quantitative data. I began by trialling a semi-structured questionnaire with the parents and teachers. I then used the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* to determine descriptive and inferential statistics; however, due to the nature of the data I modified this approach to correlate the findings with a limited number of quantitative questions. This was supported by the parents' and teachers' favourable responses to the open questions concerning sociopolitical issues around gender, allowing for more individual views to be given. To expand and interpret the open-ended responses, I established it would be beneficial to divide the questionnaire into thematic sections, which would also support the triangulation of findings. I had planned to do group semi-structured interviews with the teachers, as this is generally considered to increase the representativeness of the responses. (Denscombe, 2010). I realised that due to the amount of available time during the school day and limited staff-

cover for teachers, group sessions would not be feasible in the main study. Instead I conducted one-to-one interviews with a few teachers using an interview guide with possible questions, possible follow-up questions and probes, which I shortened in my main study.

One of the most significant findings from the pilot study was that in order to gain an even richer and more in-depth understanding of young children's views and participation, a greater emphasis on qualitative research was needed. I therefore chose in my main study to incorporate the Mosaic approach with the children, adding extra story related activities. My pilot study showed that the young girls had a fixation with *Disney* fairy tale princesses, although these story characters were not explored in the literacy curriculum. Furthermore, the findings indicated that there was a covert gender bias in the teachers' choices of stories, directed specifically to stimulate boys' interest. Thus, I decided in my central study rather than using children's contemporary picture book stories to use fairy stories with un-stereotypical female protagonists. This choice was made as the children's picture books seemed to confirm traditional gender stereotypes instead of challenging or encouraging alternatives ones.

Appendix 2: Letter of consent to headteachers

Centre For Education Studies
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL

Date

Dear (*Headteacher*)

I am conducting research for a Doctoral thesis, which involves exploring young children's development of gender attributes and responses to stereotypes through the medium of stories. I am particularly attracted by what your school would have to offer in respect of my research, and would like to undertake part of this project in your setting. My research will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Liz Coates and Dr. Hilary Minns. I will be using fairy tales, both traditional and contemporary, and ones that relate to present day family issues to explore the impact they have on children's perception of gender and how male and female role models influence children's identities. This evidence will help me to understand how stories contribute to children's emotional awareness and understanding of relationships. I am very willing to come and discuss my research with you, the teachers and parents who might be interested to participate, and to the chair of governors if required.

My research is focused on the responses of reception-aged children to particular stories. My intention is to carry out four story group sessions with three groups of children, over the next two terms. The three groups would consist of two single sex groups and a mixed-sex group. I anticipate that each session will be thirty minutes long, making a total of two hours for each group. These sessions will be recorded (subject to consent), through children's drawings, photographs, videotaping and audiotaping. The research will also include questionnaires and interviews (also subject to consent) with class teachers and parents of the children in each group.

There are three main aims to my research. First, to reflect upon the importance of the identification and balance of gendered stereotypes when choosing books to share with children. Second, to raise awareness of the impact and future implications that story choices and messages have on the development of children's individuality and emotional receptiveness. Third, to provide suggestions for developing critical storytelling discussions that enable imaginative responses and transformative ideas. From these aims, it can be seen that the research intends to make a valuable contribution to the school's Equal Opportunities policy, to supplement staff development and enhance home-school links.

Please find enclosed copies of the measure and consent forms to be used in the research process. A copy of my CRB disclosure form is available if required. If you wish for any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 07590 035XXX or by email

████████████████████.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Yours sincerely

Jane E Bradford BEd (Hons) MA, Doctoral Researcher in Education
Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick

Appendix 3: Field note example

Extract of notes from *Zog* storytelling session at School A

Whilst waiting for me, the boys were discussing friendships and how they would be friends tomorrow/forever. Giving out the name stickers – two boys were keen to state how they were winning – competitiveness. They discussed what they loved/hated – very black and white distinctions.

Zog – most had the picture book at home, but one boy told me that 'it's gone in my bin'. Already social pressure not to look as if a serious reader in front of his peers. One boy had watched *Zog* on video. I enquired if the boys knew any other stories by Julia Donaldson, such as *The Gruffalo*. None of the boys recalled any without my prompting.

When I introduced *Zog*, they first categorised what colour he was – orange. Then they each wanted to be one of the dragons, but there was a dilemma – who was going to be the pink one? No one wished to be the pink one (a feminine associated colour?). The illustrations captured the boys' interest, and were keen to spot the other animals. I began reading - *Madam Dragonfly* - and then corrected myself, during which time one of the boys called out that there was a dragonfly in the picture! The illustrations successfully helped the boys to become engaged with the story who *moaned extra loudly* when they could not see the pictures.

After the phrase 'fully grown' I said to the boys, 'everyone stand-up tall' – encouraging assertive posture. The boys quickly turned it into a competition with one saying he was taller than everyone else, another could carry his little brother, followed by another who could carry everyone and finally with one saying he could carry the whole school... I told the story in a more robust manner with the boys than with the girls.

Appendix 4: Letter of consent to teachers

(Headed University note paper)

University of Warwick
Centre For Education Studies
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL

Date

Dear (*Class Teacher*)

I am very grateful for your willingness to participate in this study and now invite you to complete the attached questionnaire. The results will contribute to my doctoral research on how children's stories help to shape young children's gender identities. I will be using fairy tales, both traditional and contemporary, and ones that relate to present day family issues. These will be used to explore the impact they have on children's perception of gender and how male and female role models influence their own identities. This evidence will help me to understand how stories develop children's emotional awareness and understanding of relationships.

Before you complete this questionnaire I would like to stress there are no right or wrong answers. If there are any additional comments or feedback you wish to make, please feel free to write them beside the question or on the back of this sheet. If there are any further questions you may have concerning this questionnaire you are most welcome to contact me at [REDACTED].

I would like to assure you that your questionnaire answers will be strictly confidential and anonymous, and secure at all times.

I would be most grateful if you could return the completed questionnaire to the school office in the envelope provided by..... *date*.

I would like to thank you for your time and commitment in completing this questionnaire. Your answers will contribute to the development of the Early Years Curriculum, particularly in the areas of literature, literacy and personal and social education.

Yours sincerely

Jane E Bradford BEd (Hons) MA
Doctoral Researcher in Education

Appendix 5: Teacher questionnaire

Questionnaire on Children's Responses to Stories

Please ring the appropriate answer:

1. Sex Male Female Other Prefer not to say

2. Age group 16-24 25-34 35-49 50-64 65+ Prefer not to say

3. Brief description of your responsibilities in school:

Emotional awareness

4. Did you have any favourite stories as a child or did you prefer books with a different genre?

5. Can you list five books you enjoy sharing most with the children?

<u>Top 5 shared fairy tales</u>	<u>Elements of popularity</u>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

6. Are there any particular kinds of stories that you tend to avoid sharing? If so, why might this be?

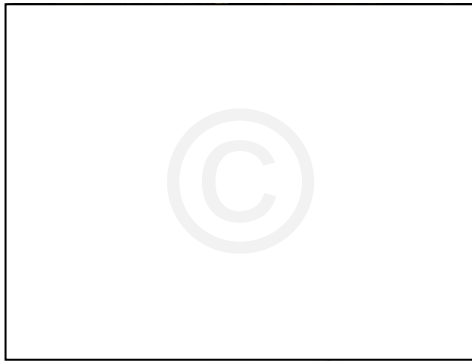
7. What do you consider are the current story hooks that are most effective for drawing children into a story picture book?

For boys:

For girls:

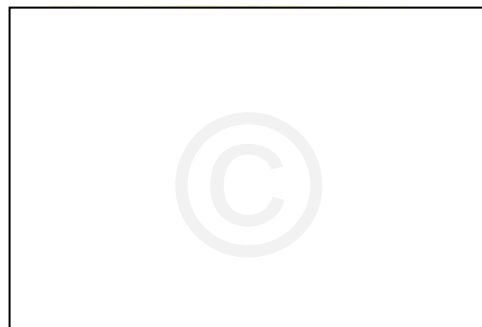
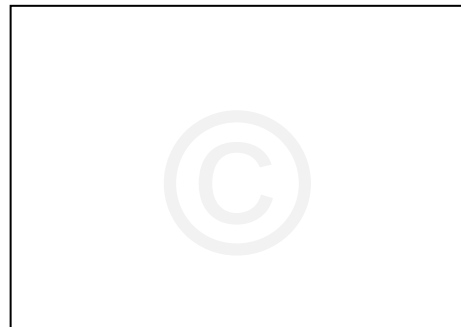
8. Do you share traditional fairy tales with the children in the class? Are there any much-loved ones?

17. Which of the children's book illustrations would you be happy to share with your class, and what is your response to the messages in the pictures?



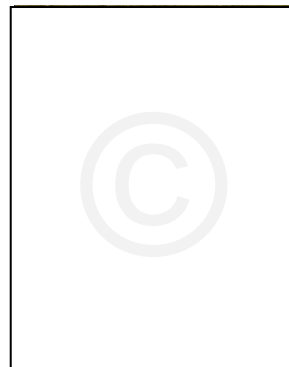
a. (Prince Ronald furious at Princess Elizabeth's 'ordinary' paper bag dress)

b. (Gretel pushing the witch into her oven)



c. (Molly Whoopie stealing the Ogre's purse)

d. (Choosing singledom over marriage)



e. (A beautiful princess disguised under an ugly donkey skin)

f. (Wicked stepmother or witch.... behind bars)

Gendered relationships

18. Do you balance the ratio of leading female and male characters when choosing stories to share? If yes, please give examples of stories used.

19. When reading about the leading characters in stories might you discuss (please tick):

		<i>Always</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Other</i>
a) Male lead character						
	Virtues and attributes					
	Emotions described					
	Other male roles in the story					
	Female roles in the story					
Might you transpose the gender of the lead character?						
b) Female lead character		<i>Always</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Other</i>
	Virtues and attributes					
	Emotions described					
	Other female roles in the story					
	Male roles in the story					
Might you transpose the gender of the lead character?						

20. Which 3 emotive words might you use to describe these characters:

<u>Story Characters</u>	<u>Emotive words</u>		
Jack (from Jack and the Beanstalk)			
The Queen (from Snow White)			
Mouse (Gruffalo)			
Father (from Hansel and Gretel)			
Goldilocks (Three Bears)			

21. Which strategies might you find to be most effective in developing children's critical thinking towards messages in stories?

22. What follow-on storytelling activities might you find to be most effective in deepening children's emotional response to stories?

Professional matters

23. Have you been on any gender awareness training? If yes, please give details.

24. Do you make contributions to any storytelling publications or social media such as blog post, forums or twitter? If yes, please give details.

25. How do you develop equal opportunities in the classroom for each child?

Thank you very much for your time in completing this questionnaire; your answers will greatly support future work and research into equal opportunities and gender awareness for children.

Appendix 6: Prompt sheet for interview with teachers

Children's Responses to Stories

1. How important is the issue of gender in your classroom teaching and telling of stories? (*Pedagogical ideology*)
2. Do you divide the class by gender at any point? (*Gender categorisation*)
3. Do you speak differently to boys and girls? (*Gender beliefs and behaviours*)
4. Do you have different sanctions for boys and girls? (*Gender roles and socialisation*)
5. Do you converse more with either girls or boys? (*Gender relationships*)
6. Do you find boys and girls stereotype themselves? If so, do you do anything to break them out of that stereotype? (*Gender roles*)
7. Do you think a gender-neutral policy is possible within a mixed-sex and cultural setting? (*Pedagogical ideology*)
8. Do you use stories that challenge stereotypes, such as where girls are chosen to be assertive and boys as caring? (*Alternative/subversive role models*)
9. Which fairy tales do you draw upon in your teaching and why? (*Choice and rationale*)
10. What criteria do you use when choosing fiction books for your classroom? (*Choice and rationale*)
11. How do you extend the relational experiences of children in storytelling? (*Gender relationships*)
12. How do you engage parents in matters concerning equal opportunities, inclusivity and gender diversity? (*Gender roles and socialisation*)
13. How do you address non-traditional families in stories and storytelling? (*Alternative and subversive role models*)
14. Have you experienced any resistance and what risks are you prepared to take? (*Pedagogical ideology*)
15. Would you welcome more male practitioners in the early years? (*Pedagogical ideology*)
16. Can you tell me how you arrived in teaching? (*Gender role models and socialisation*)

Thank you for taking part in this interview.

Appendix 7: Letters of consent to parents

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am writing to request permission for your child to participate in my educational research study. I am a doctoral student from the Centre for Education Studies at the University of Warwick. My research will investigate how children's stories help to shape young children's gender identities. I will be using fairy tales, both traditional and contemporary, and ones that relate to present day family issues. These will be used to explore the impact they have on children's perception of gender and how male and female role models influence children's identities. This evidence will help me to understand how stories develop and contribute to children's emotional awareness and understanding of relationships.

I will be working with three story groups, for six thirty-minute sessions over the next half term. The children will be involved in listening and responding to the stories, followed by related activities. I will collect data from each session by taking photographs, and making digital audio recordings and videos, some of which the children will be encouraged to record for themselves.

This research study follows the University of Warwick ethical requirements for carrying out research in an educational setting. Participation in this study is, of course, voluntary. Even if you give your permission for your child to participate, your child will still be free to refuse to participate in the storytelling activities. If your child agrees to participate, they will continue to be free to end the participation at any time. Any information that is obtained in connection with the research and that can be identified with you or your child or the school will only be disclosed with your signed permission. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout and names of all participants will be anonymised.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please email me at [REDACTED]. Please keep this letter after completing the consent section below, which should be returned to (*class teacher*). I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

Jane E Bradford BEd (Hons) MA
Doctoral Researcher in Education

RE: Research on storytelling and the development of children's identities

Child's name _____ is
able/unable to take part (please delete as appropriate).

Parent/Guardian name: _____

Parent/Guardian signature: _____

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am grateful to you for allowing your child to participate in the study on *Children's Responses to Stories*, and I now invite you to complete a questionnaire. The results will contribute to research on how children's stories help to shape young children's gender identities.

Before you complete this questionnaire I would like to stress there are no right or wrong answers. If there are any additional comments you wish to make, please feel free to write them beside the question or on the back of this sheet. If there are any further questions you may have concerning this questionnaire you are most welcome to contact me at

████████████████████.

I would like to assure you that your questionnaire answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous, and secure at all times.

I would be most grateful if you could return the completed questionnaire to *the teacher* in the envelope provided by..... *date*.

I would like to thank you for your time and commitment in completing this questionnaire. Your answers will support the development of the Early Years curriculum, particularly in the areas of literacy and personal, social and health education.

Yours sincerely

Jane E Bradford BEd (Hons) MA
Doctoral Researcher in Education

Appendix 8: Parent questionnaires

Questionnaire on Children's Responses to Stories

Please put a ring the appropriate answer:

1. Sex Male Female Other Prefer not to say
2. Age group 16-24 25-34 35-49 50-64 65+ Prefer not to say
3. Your occupation:

Emotional awareness

4. Did you have favourite stories from when you were a child? If yes, please list.
5. Which ways of storytelling do you use at home (please circle):
 - a. Picture books
 - b. Tablets
 - c. Orally
 - d. Other (please state):
6. Can you list five books you enjoy sharing most with your child at home?

<u>Top 5 shared picture books</u>	<u>When and how often?</u>

7. What do you think are the current story hooks for your child when choosing a story picture book?
8. Do you share traditional fairy tales with your child? Do they have any much-loved ones?
9. Do you share contemporary fairy tales with your child, for example *Zog* by Julia Donaldson? Do they have any much-loved stories?

10. When reading the ending ‘happily ever after’, have you discussed with your child what this might mean to them? Please note any hopes, aspirations or fears they have expressed.

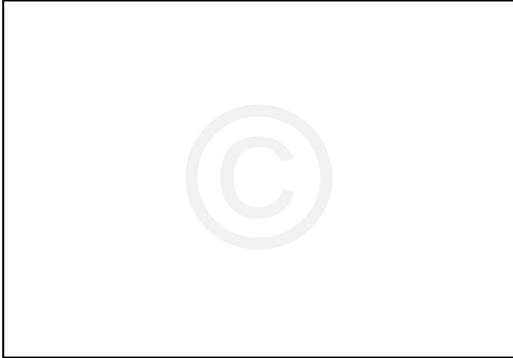
11. Are there any particular kinds of fairy stories that you tend to avoid sharing? If so, why might this be?

12. What might you do when you share a picture book with *your child*? Please tick.

Storytelling strategy	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Other
Reflect upon the ideas in the story e.g. adventure, trickery					
Debate the virtues displayed in the story such as bravery, kindness, cleverness					
Challenge gender stereotypes – e.g. assertive girls and kind boys					
Create alternate endings e.g. they agreed just to be friends rather than marry					
Other (please state): e.g. encourage recounting of the story					

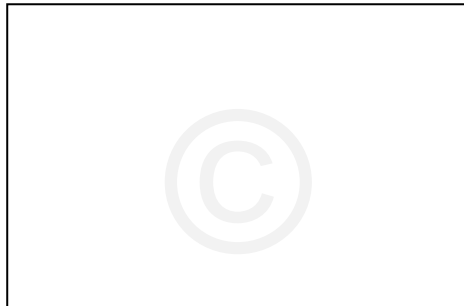
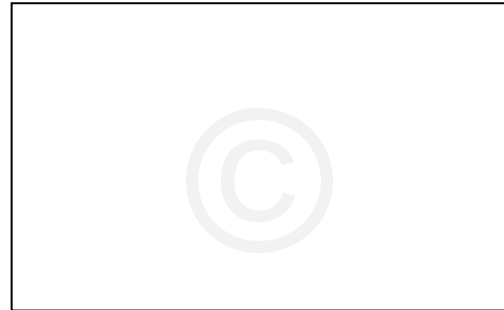
13. Does your child engage in dramatic play? If so, which characters has your child acted out in role-play at home, either fictional or real?

14. Which of these children’s book illustrations would you be happy to share with your child, and what is your response to the messages in the pictures?



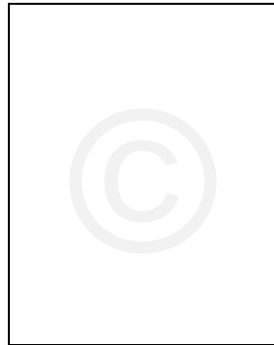
e. (Prince Ronald furious at Princess Elizabeth's 'ordinary' paper bag dress)

f. (Gretel pushing the witch into her oven)



g. (Molly Whoopie stealing the Ogre's purse)

h. (Choosing singledom over marriage)



e. (A beautiful princess disguised under an ugly donkey skin)

f. (Wicked stepmother or witch...behind bars)

Natural perceptions

If your answer is yes to the following questions please provide examples or explanations.

15. Do you talk to your child about what the leading character's ambitions or goals might be?

16. Do you discuss the physical appearance of characters and why they might be portrayed in a particular way?

17. Would you consider a story with a woman baking the cake or a man as a woodcutter as restrictive or liberated, for example as found in *Donkeyskin* and *Hansel and Gretel*?

18. Do you discuss who is delivering the justice in the stories and compare what punishment is being delivered to which character?

19. Might you choose stories that present non-typical family values, for example stepfamilies, one-parent families, same-sex parents?

Parental aids

20. Do you and your child take part in any library story initiatives, story festivals or drama groups?

21. Do you make any contributions to publications or social media such as storytelling blog post or forums?

Thank you very much for your time in completing this questionnaire; your answers will greatly support future work and research into equal opportunities and gender awareness for children.

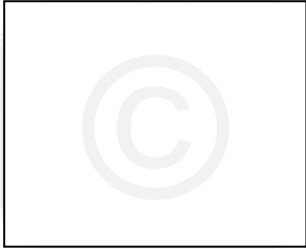

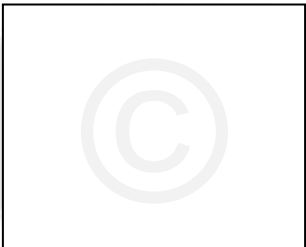
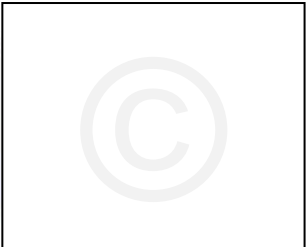

If you would be willing to be interviewed please sign your name.....

Please use this sheet for any additional comments.

Parent questionnaire (Short version)

Questionnaire on Children's Responses to Picture Books and Stories

Please tick an answer and add any additional comments you may wish to express.						
1. Did you have any favourite stories as a child?	Many	Some	A few	None	Other	Please list
2. Which storytelling forms do you use at home with your child?	Picture books	Tablets	Oral	None	Other	Favourite
3. Do you share fairytales?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Other	Comment
4. Are there stories that you would avoid?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not knowingly	Comment
5. Does your child like to dress up as a story character?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Other	Comment
6. Would you discuss the following aspects?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Other	Comment
i) the moral codes of behavior e.g. self-sacrifice or not being greedy?						
ii) the emotional elements e.g. bullying or feeling abandoned and lonely?						
iii) the physical appearance of characters e.g. being handsome or ugly?						
iv) the development of characters e.g. experience of hardship leading to inner strength and endurance?						
v) the magical features e.g. power of love or jealousy, or self-belief?						

7. Have you shared any of these illustrations with your child? If so, did you share these illustrations in particular?	Often	Some-times	Not noted	Rarely	Other	Comment
 <p>i) Prince Ronald furious at Princess Elizabeth's 'ordinary' paper bag dress. (From: <i>The Paper Bag Princess</i>)</p>						
 <p>ii) Gretel pushing the witch into her oven, with Jack trapped and helpless. (From: <i>Hansel and Gretel</i>)</p>						
 <p>iii) Molly Whuppie stealing the Ogre's money purse. (From: <i>Molly Whuppie</i>)</p>						
 <p>iv) Celebrating being 'me', our personal gifts and qualities. (From: <i>The Paper Bag Princess</i>)</p>						
 <p>v) A beautiful Princess disguised under a grey, ugly and smelly Donkey-skin. (From: <i>The Donkey Skin</i>)</p>						

Thank you very much for your time in completing this questionnaire; your answers will greatly support future work and research into equal opportunities and gender awareness for children.

If you would be willing to be interviewed please sign your name.....

Appendix 9: Diminishing and expanding self-fulfilling language

Table 1: Table to show how the children used diminishing and understating words.

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Little	Zog	<p><i>(Lack of superiority.)</i></p> <p>R: Who do you think comes to help him again?</p> <p>BG1: The nurse.</p> <p>BG2: The <i>little</i> girl.</p>		
	Willow Pattern Plate	<p><i>(Achievement modestly described.)</i></p> <p>BG1: Look at my <i>little</i> boat.</p> <p>BG2: It looks like a <i>little</i> diamond.</p> <p>BG3: It looks like a jewel, doesn't it?</p> <p>BG2: A crystal jewel.</p> <p>BG4: I've made a <i>little</i> sailor boat.</p> <p>R: Well done. Now you turn the paper... Now we're going to fold the flaps over.</p> <p>CG: Like this?</p>		

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Little		<p>R: Yes.</p> <p>G: I've got <i>little</i> ones</p> <p><i>(Meaningfulness of her musical passion tempered.)</i></p> <p>CG: Ooh, shall we sing that <i>little</i> thingy, we're floating on the sea?</p> <p><i>(Reducing the importance of the cat to her.)</i></p> <p>CG: I've got a very sad thing. When I had a <i>little</i> cat what my mummy had and my daddy... she... she... um, stabbed with his knife because he didn't like it and then my cat died.</p>		
	Molly Whuppie	<p><i>(Lack of superiority.)</i></p> <p>AG: I want to draw one of the <i>little</i> girls and Molly.</p>	<p><i>(Defencelessness of girls.)</i></p> <p>R: So, the little girl said to the sisters, 'Let's find a home for tonight,</p>	

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Little		<p>(<i>Understatement of physical condition.</i>)</p> <p>BG: My tummy hurts a <i>little</i> bit.</p> <p>BG: That's a <i>little</i> ring.</p>	<p>because otherwise we're going to be in the cold'.</p> <p>BB: Like the <i>little</i> pigs, but the Wolf blewed their houses down.</p>	
	Donkeyskin		<p>(<i>A perceptive remark that can be interpreted either way.</i>)</p> <p>R: The courtiers searched throughout the lands, far and wide for a suitable bride. They could not find anyone as beautiful as the king's old wife. Years passed and gradually the king noticed his adopted daughter. He said, 'I want to marry her.' Do you think that's right?</p> <p>B: No, because she is too <i>little</i>.</p>	<p>(<i>Little is used in reference to their lack of stature compared to adults.</i>)</p> <p>R: Can you think of another person who crept up to a cottage in a fairy tale and was punished?</p> <p>AB: The <i>little</i> girl.</p> <p>AB: It was about some fairies and they were walking up some things... and a <i>little</i> fairy came, and then a witch was there, and I think I remember this bit... The witch did turn into something.</p>

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Little				CG: I've got a good thing! I've got something to say. I'm not sure what it's called, but once two <i>little</i> girls tried to fix a Christmas tree up together, but then the adults come and tell them off, but they didn't know, because they were crawling. They saw it... The Christmas tree attached together.
	Hansel and Gretel	<p>(<i>Status of an old woman's property.</i>)</p> <p>AG: I didn't see the witch's <i>little</i> cottage.</p> <p>(<i>Cultural interpretation.</i>)</p> <p>R: Do you know this story?</p> <p>BG: No. Is it <i>Little</i> Red Riding Hood?</p>		
Tiny	Willow Pattern Plate	<p>(<i>Achievement understated.</i>)</p> <p>R: Now, you fold it in half again, like a book. Yes, like a book.</p> <p>AG: Like a <i>tiny weeny</i> book.</p>		

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Tiny	Donkeyskin	<p><i>(Invisibility associated with femininity.)</i></p> <p>R: Do you remember how Goldilocks ate the porridge and she was chased by the bears wasn't she?</p> <p>BG: She was so <i>tiny</i> that she walked off with it.</p>		
	Hansel and Gretel	<p><i>(Reducing symbolism of purity associated with femininity.)</i></p> <p>R: Can you see he is dropping a white pebble in the picture?</p> <p>CG: It's there, it's <i>tiny</i>.</p>		
Small	Zog	<p><i>(Identity associated with invisibility.)</i></p> <p>I want to be a worm</p> <p>R: Would you like to be her friend?</p> <p>CG: No.</p> <p>R: Why not?</p> <p>G: Because I will be too small to see her.</p>		

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Small		<p>R: You'd be too small? G: Yes. I'd be a worm. R: Okay, and in real life, how would you feel? G: Happy. R: Why would you be happy to see her? G: Because she looks after me. R: Because she looks after you. And why do you like worms? G: Because they're very <i>small</i>. R: And you like small things? G: Yes.</p>		
	Molly Whuppie	<p>(<i>Desire for small objects.</i>) BG: You should have brought a <i>small</i> one. R: Do you think I should have bought a smaller one? BG: Yes, but the same... The same in a <i>smaller</i> size.</p>		

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Small	Hansel and Gretel	<p>(<i>Feminine identity of lower economic value.</i>)</p> <p>R: Why do you think the witch chose Hansel rather than Gretel in the cage?</p> <p>BG1: Because she liked girls.</p> <p>BG2: She wanted Gretel to do all of the work.</p> <p>R: Don't you think Hansel could have done the work?</p> <p>BG1: Yes. He was the <i>bigger</i> one and Gretel was the <i>smaller</i> one.</p> <p>(<i>Reading interest lowered.</i>)</p> <p>R: You have this book?</p> <p>BG: I have both of them but <i>smaller</i>.</p>		
Baby	Willow Pattern Plate	<p>(<i>Awareness of the patriarchal restriction of female fertility.</i>)</p> <p>AG: China... The one who said the girl couldn't get married?</p>		

Words	Fairy Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
		R: Yes, they can, but you can only have one <i>baby</i> in China. AG: Oh, that's a shame.		
	Molly Whuppie	<i>(Limiting patriarchal prescription of womanhood.)</i> R: What do you think is the most important thing? G: Having a baby.		
Baby	Hansel and Gretel	<i>(Ability to cry is perceived as a weakness.)</i> R: What would you have done if you returned home and found your mummy wasn't there and she had disappeared? G1: I would cry. G2: I wouldn't because my dad and Adam would look after me. G3: I would be really sad and I would cry as much as a <i>baby</i> .	<i>(Physical overthrow of matriarchy by reducing to state of helplessness.)</i> BB: I would make the witch go into the factory and turn into <i>baby</i> bits.	<i>(Penalty for girls' weaknesses.)</i> R: Why do you think the witch chose the girl though? B: She was being too babyish.

Table 2: Table to show how the children used expansive and powerful language.

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Big, giant, massive	Zog	<p>(<i>Lack of superiority.</i>)</p> <p>R: That was nice of the little girl wasn't it?</p> <p>G: She was <i>quite big</i>. A bit like a grown-up.</p> <p>(<i>Rare example of strong image.</i>)</p> <p>CG I want to be the <i>big</i> teacher.</p>	<p>(<i>Exaggeration.</i>)</p> <p>B: His tummy looks round; like a <i>big</i>, fat one. [Dragon puppet].</p> <p>(<i>Superiority over others.</i>)</p> <p>AB1: I'm taller than anyone. I can carry everyone.</p> <p>AB2: I can carry my little brother.</p> <p>(<i>Exaggerated machoism</i>)</p> <p>CB: The greens are going to be giants. I want to be the greens.</p>	<p>(<i>Forcefulness.</i>)</p> <p>B: I am going to turn into a <i>big</i> Dalek.</p>
	Paper Bag Princess		<p>(<i>Exaggerated machoism.</i>)</p> <p>R: What's your favourite story?</p> <p>CB1: <i>Superman</i>.</p> <p>CB2: <i>Superworm</i>.</p> <p>R: A worm? Is there a book called <i>Superworm</i>?</p> <p>CB2: Yeah, I've got it.</p>	<p>(<i>Maleness associated with bigness.</i>)</p> <p>AG: I know how to spell big: B – I – G.</p> <p>My Daddy has a big fat tummy and now my brother John's tummy is getting even bigger.</p> <p>Because you will be big.</p>

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p><i>Big, giant, massive</i></p>			<p>What's your favourite story? CB3: <i>Superheroes</i>, and how they became superheroes. CB4: Mine's a guy who has really long legs and then he... Yes, his name is Daddy Long Legs. He smashes houses and tellies. R: Why does he do that? CB4: Because he just does. And look, there's a <i>little</i> house, and look how <i>big</i> he is compared to the house. R: And who stops him smashing everyone's house? CB4. No one can.</p> <p>B: Look, I've drawn big claws. ... Big claws. ...With big, heavy heads.</p>	<p><i>(Descriptive metaphor imaginatively changed.)</i> BB: <i>Big</i> Red Riding Hood.</p>

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p>Big, giant, massive</p>			<p>B: I want to be a Power Ranger Incredible Hulk monster. A <i>massive</i> one.</p>	
	<p>Willow Pattern Plate</p>		<p>(<i>Size matters.</i>) CB: Um, I think she made the right choice, um, because she wanted a <i>big</i>, a nice birdie CB: Because she wanted to marry him but then once they got married, they turned into nice swans. [Swan more highly regarded over ducks.] (<i>Safety in size.</i>) R: I think it is important to have some security. Why do you think it doesn't matter?</p>	

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p>Big, giant, massive</p>			<p>BB: Because, if you had a big treasure chest in the room, you wouldn't be able to get in.</p> <p><i>(Pride in accomplishment.)</i></p> <p>BB: I made a <i>big</i> boat. Look at my <i>big</i> boat.</p> <p><i>(Being fierce and threatening.)</i></p> <p>BB: I am going to make a wolf. A <i>big</i> bad wolf.</p> <p><i>(Association of status with size of model and possessions.)</i></p> <p>R: Then Chang and Koong-se landed on an island, and they built a great farm. Chang became very famous and was able to grow wonderful things because he used the jewels to buy exotic plants from</p>	

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p><i>Big, giant, massive</i></p>			<p>different countries. But do you think Ta-jin was happy with all this? ALL: No. R: How do you think he felt? B1: Sad. B2: Angry. B3: Sad. R: What would you do if you're angry? B4: I would try and get them. R: Yes. B4: I would build another boat. B5: Why about smack them in their face? R: What would you do if they lived by the paddy fields in China? B4: I know. You can maybe build a <i>big</i> boat and go to the same island and try and find them, then chase them back.</p>	

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Big, giant, massive			<p>R: Yes, you could.</p> <p>B2: And then find their boat so you could track them so you could get the jewellery back.</p> <p>R: Ah, you think the jewels...?</p> <p>B2: Yeah, once they spend them...</p> <p>B1: I know. If you make a nice [] too then they'll give the jewels back.</p> <p>B2: That's what I was going to say.</p>	
	Molly Whuppie	<p><i>(Size is threatening.)</i></p> <p>Question: How big is the Ogre?</p> <p>G1: Is he as <i>big</i> as elephants?</p> <p>G2: Is he as <i>big</i> as a blue whale?</p> <p>R: The Ogre died in the water. But the Ogre's wife... Do you think that was fair to the Ogre's wife?</p>	<p><i>(Identity and importance of size.)</i></p> <p>BB: I've got a giant and he's really <i>big</i> and <i>gigantic</i> and I like it.</p> <p>BB: He's really <i>big</i> and he's green. [The Ogre.]</p> <p>BB: I want to be the <i>big</i> Ogre.</p> <p>BB: Is he as <i>big</i> as a Transformer? [The Ogre.]</p>	<p><i>(Influence of others on perceptions.)</i></p> <p>AB: But I'm going to smack it with a <i>big</i> sword on the head.</p> <p>R: What would you like to take with you on your quest?</p> <p>BB1: A <i>massive</i> sword.</p> <p>BG: I'm going to draw a pretty princess. With a <i>big, massive</i> head.</p> <p>BB2: I'm drawing a <i>big</i> sword.</p> <p>BB3: A magic sword.</p>

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p>Big, giant, massive</p>		<p>AG: No, but he did do <i>big</i> steps, he can do <i>big</i> steps. So that's why he fell into the water and died.</p>	<p>BB: I'm really high and I get exercise and I eat healthy food. When I go to big school, I'll get <i>bigger</i> and <i>bigger</i> and <i>bigger</i>... and then I'm going to be [points] that big.</p> <p>(<i>Size and heroism.</i>)</p> <p>AB: But it's like Shrek because he walked away from the house because they went and a naughty like fairy... They went into her house and it was full of, like, little blue ogres. And the <i>biggest</i> ogre was Shrek, and he was the one who was the good Shrek, and he and the donkey were trying to get out of it and trying to get the white boot and then the donkey tried to do a horse!</p>	<p>It's a <i>big</i> magic sword, and its pointy bits here, and this is the handle, and these are bubbles that make people change.</p>

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p>Big, giant, massive</p>			<p>AB: I've heard a story... My mum read me, one night, and it was this <i>big</i> man, and he was called Ogre too and he was a knight.</p> <p><i>(Emphasis on the success of the exploit.)</i></p> <p>R: And what happens to Peter Pan?</p> <p>AB: Captain Hook traps him, but Jake and the Neverland pirates... Peter Pan got stuck in this <i>big</i> cage and he had a hook, but Jake jumped on the tree and cut it, and then he pulled the... He got the key off Captain Hook's ship and then he unlocked it, so... And then, Peter Pan magically threw him in the water.</p>	

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<p>Big, giant, massive</p>	<p>Donkeyskin</p>		<p><i>(Tallest animal.)</i> R: If you had written the story, what animal skin would you have chosen? AB1: Sheep. AB2: I would use a <i>big</i> giraffe.</p> <p><i>(Being dominant.)</i> R: Can you tell me the fairy tale story where someone creeps up to the cottage? AB: Like the <i>big</i> bad wolf? He blew the house down, then one pig went in the others but then he blew it down but the wolf couldn't blow the other one down.</p>	

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Big, giant, massive			<p>(<i>Observation of big role models.</i>)</p> <p>R: Can you tell me about any fairy tales where children get told off for exploring?</p> <p>CB: No, here's one about <i>big</i> people.... It was '<i>I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here</i>' because they go through the forest and they scared about snakes and birds.</p>	
	Hansel and Gretel		<p>(<i>Exhibitionism.</i>)</p> <p>CB: Next year I'm going to have a great <i>big</i>...birthday cake</p> <p>(<i>Machoism.</i>)</p> <p>C BOY:</p> <p>I would chop the wicked witch up with my massive hammer.</p>	
Super	Zog			<p>(<i>Influence on cross-gendered perceptions.</i>)</p> <p>B: Tiger <i>super</i>man.</p>

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Super			<p><i>(Moral emphasis.)</i></p> <p>AB: I'm a super spaceship. I'm a <i>super</i> spaceship that can kill baddies.</p> <p><i>(Pride in achievement.)</i></p> <p>CB: I would like to be the winner of <i>super</i> writing.</p>	<p>R: What would you like to receive a medal for at school?</p> <p>B: Tiger superman is a <i>superhero</i>. I like <i>superhero</i> books.</p> <p>BG: Super-duper tidying.</p>
	Willow Pattern Plate		<p><i>(Quest to be heroes.)</i></p> <p>CB1: Guess what this is, Henry. Henry, is this how you spell your name? Huh - eh - nn - ruh - yuh?</p> <p>CB2: Huh - eh - nuh- ruh - yuh. Henry, <i>super</i> Henry! <i>Superhero</i> Henry!</p>	

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Super	Molly Whuppie		(<i>Quest for supremacy and rule.</i>) AB: A <i>super powers</i> . My two swords are going to be really <i>powerful</i> , and I need...	
	Hansel and Gretel	(Inferiority to boys.) R: Why do you think the witch chose Hansel the boy rather than the girl? CG: Maybe because he is bigger and his tummy is a bit bigger than Gretel's.		
Strong	Willow Pattern Plate		(<i>Leading role model.</i>) [Cracked plate.] BB1: My Daddy's got really really <i>strong</i> glue. BB2: Or you could stick it back together with Sellotape. BB3: You can't with Sellotape. It will just still fall apart. BB2: I know.	

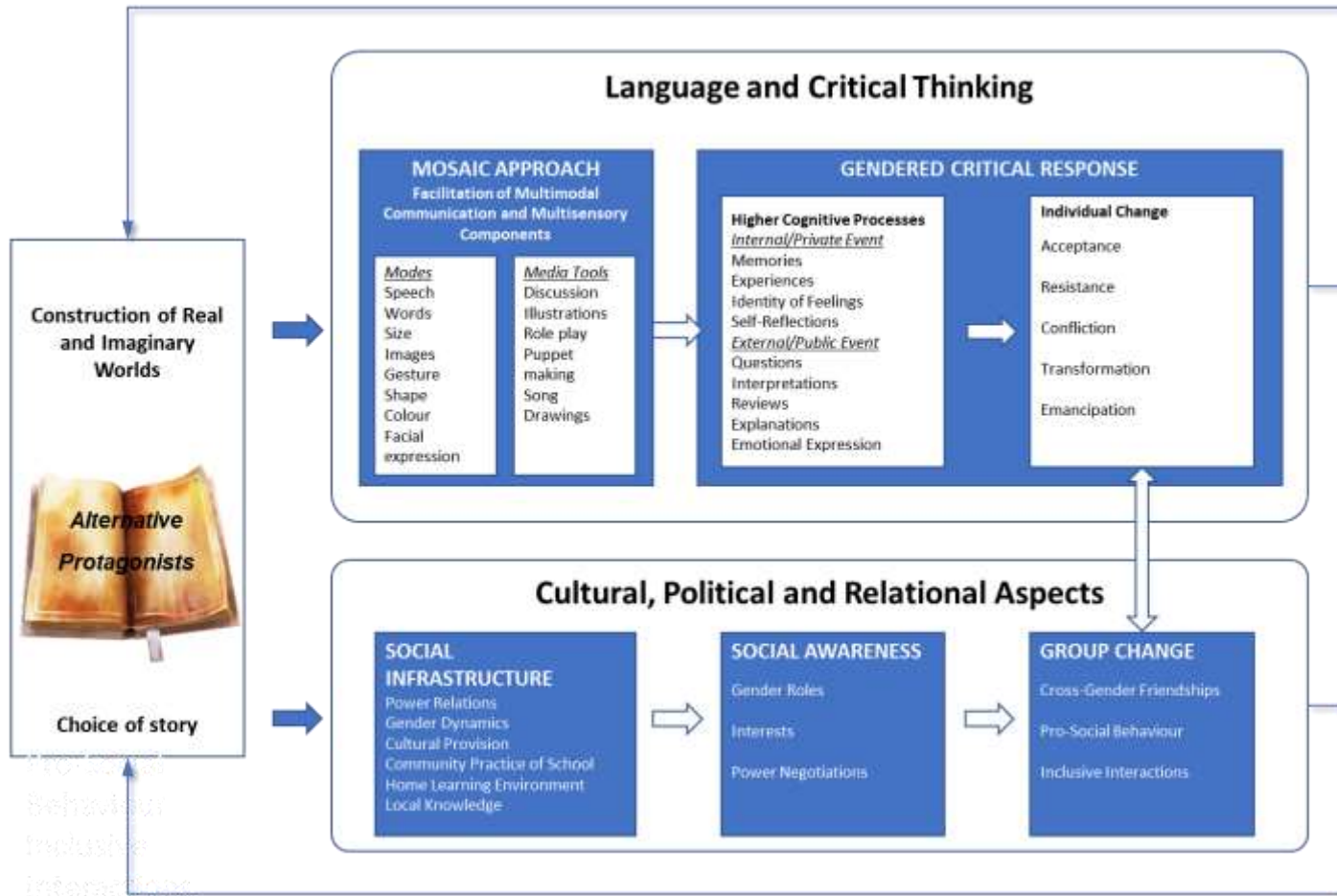
Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Strong			BB4: That thing cracked? BB1: Yep. My Daddy has <i>super super super super</i> sticky glue. It sticks to everything.	
	Molly Whuppie		(<i>Identity and machoism.</i>) R: In a lot of stories the leading character is clever. What other qualities do you think are important? Is it important to be kind? CB: Being <i>strong</i> .	
Power	Paper Bag Princess			(<i>Belief in patriarchal supremacy.</i>) R: When he got back, he was too tired to talk and he lay down and went to sleep. CG: Why doesn't he get his <i>power</i> and go "Roar"?
	Willow Pattern Plate	(<i>Critique of power.</i>) R: Why do you think she shouldn't have disobeyed her father?		

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
Power		G: Because he shouldn't have this <i>power</i> to say, "No!" tell her off.		
	Molly Whuppie		(<i>Hierarchy of supremacy.</i>) AB: To make them really <i>powerful</i> ...and they can have these two swords. <i>The ThunderCats</i> have the little one, and the <i>Power Rangers</i> have the <i>big</i> one. R: Why do the <i>Power Rangers</i> have the <i>big</i> one? AB: Because they're more <i>powerful</i> than <i>ThunderCats</i> .	
	Hansel and Gretel		(<i>Power and determination for independence.</i>) CB1: I would be the boy because he got locked in a cage and I would kick the cage open and grab the lock and find the passcode. CB2: I would do the same as Oliver.	(<i>Influence on cross-gendered attributes.</i>) R: You're Gretel, you would like to be Gretel? CG: I'm <i>super strong</i> .

Words	Story	Girls	Boys	Mixed
<i>Power</i>			<p>CB3: I would be the girl because I could... What did the girl do?</p> <p>CB4: Is it because you have got powers?</p> <p>R: She pushed the witch into the oven and saved them.</p> <p>CB4: She needs mighty <i>powers</i>.</p> <p>CB3: Yes. I would do that; I would be the girl because I would push the witch in the oven and I would not be locked in a cage.</p>	

Appendix 10: Thematic analysis of the multimodal process

Diagram to show the thematic analysis of the iterative process of critical gendered responses in young children



Appendix 11: Minecraft drawings and puppet

The boys in the state schools had a fascination with the Minecraft creeper (Mojang, 2001), an angry, destructive, mob-monster that ambushed other players. The game enabled imaginative thinking within a mythical plane, hence the rules were metaphysical and the interactive plot shaped the story framework. The creative interplay between the characters empowered the boys to transcend their individual constraints with confidence, ingenuity and strength, and so rise triumphantly. These achievements were evident in their illustrations (Figs. 11.1- 11.3), and demonstrated the cultural production and reinforcement of docile bodies through story media, as Foucault (1995) recognised.



Fig. 11.3 Slaughter (school C)

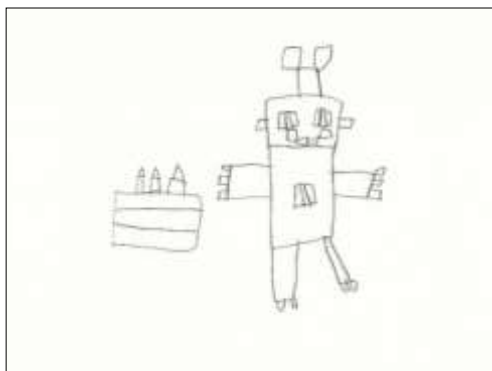


Fig. 11.2 A block cake that makes you bigger (school B).



Fig. 11.1 Ammunition (school C).