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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**Comics in Education**

**The Link between Visual and Verbal Literacy:**

**How Readers Read Comics**

4

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

Faculty of Educational Studies

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy

**COMICS IN EDUCATION**  
**THE LINK BETWEEN VISUAL AND VERBAL LITERACIES**  
**HOW READERS READ COMICS.**

by Wendy Frances Helsby

This case study investigates how readers read comics. The work, based upon Roland Barthes' concept of relay discussed in Image, Music, Text (1977), considers that a reader understands the comic at the higher level of the diegesis by switching between signifying systems. The research findings suggest that the reading of comics requires visual and verbal intermediate literacy skills and that textual coherence occurs for readers when they reach the critical point in their own reading. The coherence of the text and critical point for the reader are achieved as a result of the connections between the signifying systems of description and depiction, at the level of the individual sign and the textual structure. The analysis of such data as the features of the comic and readers' responses to texts, proposes a model based upon the concept of a core and periphery spiral. It suggests that knowledge frameworks, visual and verbal literacy and the metalinguistic skill of 'relay' are required to read the comic text; but in order to reach a critical point for understanding these need to be synthesised with affective responses. The comic form is also placed into a cultural and literacy context and implications of the findings for using this form in education are discussed.

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## Preface: Visual and Verbal Literacy

Literacy has been a site of political as well as intellectual debate, but historically literacy teaching has fallen mainly into the remit of the English teacher. The general understanding is that literacy is about teaching the written word. Other disciplines, such as art or computing, may talk about literacy to teach the 'language' of their particular subject, but this knowledge is often separated from 'real' literacy and divided into convenient but discrete blocks. These divisions are not always helpful in understanding how language works for the student. Often a reader may have to synthesise knowledge from different areas, and use different conceptual paradigms, in order to interpret a text. Various theories, such as frameworks of knowledge and semiotics, have provided insights into this complex process and contributed to the ongoing discussion about definitions of language and of being literate.

The literacy debate involves both the students and the teacher. It was a professional interest in trying to implement literacy programmes to help readers that encouraged a closer look at the debate about the use of comics in education. Having worked as a primary teacher, a secondary English teacher, a specialist teacher of reading, a tutor in Adult Basic Education, in the tertiary area of education, as well as being a tutor for the Open University, I have taught students who have ranged from those heading for higher degrees, to those struggling to make sense of the basic modes of discourse in our society. Their ages have spanned from pre-school to octogenarians. Literacy styles have been as wide ranging as their ages. But in working with such disparate groups, there has been an ongoing link between teaching skills and the concept of visual and verbal literacies.

This research began with a common sense assumption that comics, by providing two signifying systems, would aid understanding in narrative structure to weaker readers. As Meek (1977) states, 'One of the recurrent handicaps of illiterate adults is their inability to anticipate what may happen in a story ... they have never learned the rules.' (p. 74) It was in trying to teach these rules that the comic was considered as

a suitable tool by the teacher. The researcher intended to see if there was evidence to support this proposition.

Thus there are two ‘personalities’ in this study: the teacher who wished to acknowledge an area of teaching within popular culture, which seemed too little regarded; and the researcher who wished to have a clearer picture of the nature of the reading process between text and image.

The study of how readers read comics is divided into three parts. The first, from Chapter 1 to Chapter 4, deals with the idea of language. It reviews the literature and previous studies and introduces Barthes’ concept of relay between words and images in a text. The second part, from Chapter 5 to Chapter 8, deals with the research and the interpretation of the data. The last section, Chapter 9, looks at the results with reference to potential as well as actual use in the educational field.

The introduction discusses the practical, contextual and theoretical background to this study. The conclusion suggests that working with this form can be fruitful for both teacher and students, but perhaps not in the way suggested by the original proposition, that comics, having pictures, would help less able readers to understand narrative structure and aid comprehension.

## Acknowledgements

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Additionally I would like to acknowledge the work of Professor Michael Benton of the School of Education on the MA(Ed) course who revived my interest in working with the comic.

Finally I would like to thank all those at the Laurels who encouraged me, and endured the effects of this research.



## Definitions of Terms and Abbreviations

The following definitions are used as they are by Halliday and Hasan (1976)

*anaphoric* relationship backward in text

*cataphoric* relationship forward in text

*exophoric* reference is not to the text at all

*endophoric* related to the text

*cartoon* - a single illustration frame or strip with humorous content. Usually found in newspapers

*code* - a system whereby signs are organized and understood

*cohesion* - a system based upon an examination of intersentential ties, (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

*comic* - a booklet of stories many of which are told through a series of pictures and words. Cheaply produced and sold separately or as a free insert in a newspaper e.g. 'The Funday Times' in the Sunday Times

*comic book* (see graphic novel and bande dessinée) - Higher production values than the comic. Often it will contain only one full length story. First popularised by Will Eisner in 1978 to describe his book, A Contract with God. In this study the term comic book and graphic novel are used interchangeably. Bande dessinée is used when referring to French texts or research.

*comic strip* (see cartoon)

*diegesis* - everything that occurs within the story frame that creates the narrative

*graphic* - drawings

*graphic novel* - see comic book

*bandes dessinée* French words to designate a comic book

*ideograph* - character in pictorial writing indicating an idea not the name of a thing (Oxford Dictionary)

*neologism* - new word or non-word

*phoneme* - basic meaningful sound

*pleonastic* - use of more words or objects than are necessary to give sense

*popular culture* - defined as culture to be found in the mass media, which is enjoyed by mass audiences and which can be defined as not 'high' culture

*reader* - the person who is 'consuming' the text

*relay* - the movement forwards and backwards, activating change in response to other changes

*semiotics* - the science of signs. The theories of Ferdinand de Saussure provided the basis of this science. He divided language acts into *langue* - the social product called *langage*, and *parole*, individual speech acts

*text* - the artefact in the medium of print.

### Abbreviations

LSS Learning Support Services at Queen Mary's College

L/A Low angle view

H/A High angle view

C/U close up

M/S mid view

L/S long view

POV point of view

References to comics and graphic texts are in bold/italic

## Chapter 1

### How do Readers Read Comics?

*“du choc des idées jaillit la lumière”* Boileau

(light is thrown by the clash of ideas)

#### Introduction

In 1845 Rudolphe Topffer had noted the power of using two systems, visual and verbal, in one text “with its dual advantage of greater conciseness and relative clarity,” (quoted in Gombrich, 1960). Topffer’s works, including *Les amours de M. Vieux Bois* (1828) and *A Partir du Docteur Festus* (1829), were admired by great literary figures such as Goethe. This was not to become the general view of stories told through images and text. Once the comic had become established within the mass media as a form of cheap entertainment directed towards the working classes and children, it also became the target for opprobrium. The popular perception during the first half of this century which has persisted (Gramsci, Selections From Prison Notebooks, 1971) is of comics being of low value and status. This was partly generated by the fact that they appeared as virtual ‘give-aways’ inside newspapers such as Alfred Harmsworth’s *Comic Cuts*, first produced 17th May 1890 (Ferris, 1971) or cheaply sold as with Harmsworth’s *Halfpenny Marvel*. It was also partly to do with the banality and questionable ideologies of the content of many of the texts.<sup>1</sup> Often it was this latter area on which the critics focused their attention, so tarring the whole form with the same ideological brush. Comics became synonymous with cheap, illiterate entertainment and were seen by definition as educationally and culturally damaging. This has obviously affected the way that such texts as graphic novels and comics have been used, or not, as a resource in the classroom (Hildick, ‘Comics, Carrots and Backward Readers’ O.U. EH207).

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<sup>1</sup> A.A.Milne said that Harmsworth had killed off the penny dreadful with the halfpenny dreadfuler.

### **The study of the process of reading comics as a research area**

It may appear that as we enter the new millennium the comic, once the most popular form of reading for many children and some adults, has reached its nadir. There is certainly evidence that other forms of popular entertainment, such as video, computer games and the Internet are progressively taking over young people's spare time (Greenfield, Mind and Media, 1984). In an attempt to counter the criticism of poor reading levels perceived in children, and partly blamed on new technologies, the present Government (1997/8) has amongst other initiatives instigated the literacy hour. So, given the current concerns expressed about literacy (DfEE, English in the National Curriculum, 1995) and the apparently inevitable move away from print, why study how lower-status forms of print, such as the comic, are read? Should not the focus not be on how readers read literature in other forms?

I suggest that there are several valid reasons for studying the reading of comics. First, it is still the cheapest form in a relatively cheap medium and therefore the most accessible to all economic levels. This is a significant factor that we should keep in mind, particularly when we are being told of the exclusivity of the newer technological forms with the development of a technologically deprived underclass. In its history the comic has been available for even the poorest of readers. Its cheapness has allowed it to be lent, sold on, given away, borrowed in the barter and exchange of the playground market place. Even critics of the form such as Orwell have confessed the pleasure, which he describes as the 'bliss', experienced when as a child he read a comic in a secluded loft corner. His nostalgic description in the opening paragraph of his polemical essay, Boys' Weeklies (1946) suggests some of the charm of the egalitarian nature of the form, "a poky little window with sweetbottles and packets of Players and a dark interior smelling of liquorice allsorts and festooned from floor to ceiling with vilely printed twopenny papers." Additionally, the comic has also been the reading of choice for many readers irrespective of ease of access. (Conner, Educational Review, No 6)

Another factor is that the comic, and its more mature partner the graphic novel, has entered that special world of myth and cultural reference reserved for the most powerful of cultural messengers. If we take Gramsci's (1971) view that an individual's consciousness is constructed out of the past, comics are one of the 'fossils' which are traceable as part of that inventory that has social consequences in the present. Comic book characters are often articulated within other media forms for social, political and cultural purposes. Anomic characters such as Dennis the Menace and Minnie the Minx are used to undermine adult authority. Political caricatures are based on comic characters. Harold Macmillan, for example, was known as Super Mac and John Major was satirised as Superman in the political cartoons of Steve Bell in The Guardian. Other politicians have been likened to graphic characters, for example Martin Bell has appeared as Tintin (The Sunday Times 14 April 1997). The heroes of *The Beano* have transferred to different media forms including films and animation ('Dennis to menace world TV screens,' Nicholas Hellen in The Sunday Times 20 April 1997). Stories of superheroes such as Batman, Superman and The Flash have been made into mainstream films. The intertextuality has also extended to 'legitimate' or high cultural forms, as in the work of the artist Roy Lichtenstein who used comic imagery in his Pop Art, such as Whaam! 1963, (the Tate Gallery). The comic therefore also has a cultural weight.

A third reason for studying the comic is that as well as being used as a cultural reference point, the form has also become a channel for serious comment. Raymond Briggs in work such as Gentleman Jim (1981), The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman (1984) and When the Wind Blows, (1983) has addressed social and political issues. Art Spiegelmann explored the holocaust in Maus: A Survivor's Tale (1987). There are many other comics and graphic novels that have made similar serious comment. The ability of comics to be both popular and serious, combined with their accessibility, the range of possible styles and their intertextuality, appears to indicate that the form can still provide powerful resonances and the potential to engage an audience. Beylie ('*Du septième au neuvième art*', 1971, p. 35) suggested the power to go beyond the superficial level of entertainment when he wrote, "*La bande dessinée nous réapprend à rêver*". (The comic teaches us again to dream). The perception that the comic has the potential depth of a serious literary form is

also suggested by Hindle (*'The Literature Under the Desk'*, 1971) who found, when working on comics with student teachers, that comics contained “vestiges of some strange delight, some primitive myth that could communicate even through a hackneyed style and tawdry illustrations” (p. 43). He suggested that the messages traced in comics could also be found in the greatest literature.

Another reason for understanding how words and images are read in the comic is that there is a potential for educational use in the form that has never been fully appreciated in the mainstream of education. Nearly forty years ago in the introductory chapter to *Classroom Without Walls*, (1960) Carpenter in discussing the other technologies stated:

“It’s customary to answer this threat with denunciations of the unfortunate character and effect of movies and TV, just as the comic book was feared and scorned and rejected from the classroom. Its good and bad features in form and content, when carefully set beside other kinds of art and narrative, could have become a major asset to the teacher”. (p. 3)

I suggest that the comic, which is at the junction between print and the moving image and is *‘la branche mère’* (Lacassin, *‘Bande Dessinée et Language Cinématographie’*, 1971) of more recent forms such as television and film, still retains the potential in education that Carpenter saw.

The penultimate reason is that the comic combines different languages. In current communication forms the visual has become as important as the verbal. Graphic displays on screens, visual forms of entertainment with the concurrent studies they generate indicate the importance of understanding how these different languages are used by readers<sup>2</sup>. By studying various forms of visual and verbal interaction different perspectives on language may emerge. The comic is just one of these forms but it has a very specific and historically important role. The combination of images and

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<sup>2</sup> There is debate as to whether these can be called languages, discussed in Chapter 3.

words can be seen as far back as Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, religious wall paintings, commemorative forms such as the Bayeux tapestry, Hogarth's satirical cartoons and Epinal postcards (Hogben, From Cave Painting to Comic Strip, 1949). In all these forms it is the narrative function that, as in the comic, is dominant. It is this function that I suggest makes the form different from illustration and that makes it significant for literacy study. Narrative is an essential human activity; as Barthes said it is trans-historical as well as being trans-national. One of the areas that readers have to develop to become 'literate' in any culture is in understanding how narratives work, both visually and verbally. For many generations of children, the comic has been one of the most important forms for developing this understanding.

Finally, comics are not single uniform products. Like films or other forms of popular culture they are capable of considerable variety in production values, style and form, and audience. The comic therefore has the ability to be part of a wider reading experience. Content is not necessarily lowered in value by the form. This can be seen in adaptations from literary texts to graphic novel which have shown that "the level of vocabulary, readability of the printed words, the composition of the stories", offered few "meaningful differences" between the two systems, (Selwood and Irving, Harmful Publications, 1993, p. 34). There are examples of transfer of 'legitimate' texts to comic form such as the Bible into comic strip, R.L. Stevenson's Treasure Island into a graphic novel and versions of Greek Classics. A similar transformation of Shakespearean texts (Oval Projects, 1984) was given critical acclaim; "the power of this imagery is made all the more insidious by the inventive wit of many comic details. This comic book [King Lear] is clever, violent, iconoclastic." (Nokes, Times Literary Supplement, 1984).

## **The Comic in Perspective**

This positive opinion is however a minority viewpoint. The popular assumption has been that comics are a culturally illegitimate form and this has indirectly led to the conclusion that comics are therefore capable of exerting a subversive and corrupting

influence on the vulnerable members of society. It was the fear of the effect on the young of seeing violent images that gave rise to attacks by Dr. Frederic Wertham in his The Seduction of the Innocent, (1955). Wertham condemned comics as partly responsible for the rise of juvenile delinquency in America during the post World War 2 period<sup>3</sup>; “If you want to raise a generation that is half storm trooper and half cannon fodder with a dash of illiteracy then comic books are good.” (Frederic Wertham in *Comic Book Confidential*, C4, 1988). A similar campaign was waged in this country. (Pumphrey, Comics and Your Children, 1955; Barker, A Haunt of Fears, 1984).

Even before the Fifties campaign the comics were often condemned because they were seen as damaging to the moral standards of society. A typical attack was made in The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher’s Chronicle, March 20, 1947:

“I am glad to see that Mrs Leah Manning MP has been raising in the House of Commons the question of the importation from America of so-called children’s comics. She had quite a brush with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and finally offered to lend him one entitled “The Big Shot” so that he might see that, however suited these periodicals are for American children, they are quite unsuited to the more robust taste of the British boy and girl.

Mrs Manning is, of course, quite right. Trashy, sensational and unspeakably vulgar, they should be swept off every bookstall.” (quoted in The Teacher, March 1997).

Thus comic books, even though not always in a healthy economic state, have been regularly discussed, condemned and celebrated (Bande Dessinée, Radio 4, 24 April 89; ‘Why Comic Fans and Surfers lose the script’ Times Educational Supplement 10 January 1997).

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<sup>3</sup> The media effects debate continues today with the focus on video nasties, games and the Internet.



Popular culture has always been the focus of moral and social boundary setting. In a sense the comic's condemnation has been just one part of a necessary ritual, part of the evolution of 'structures of feeling' which Raymond Williams (Culture and Society, 1958) suggested reflected and supported the hegemonic interests of society, (Bourdieu, Power and Ideology in Education, 1977).

Another criticism of comics along similar lines was that they induced political atrophy. One of the most famous critics was George Orwell in his essay, 'Boys' Weeklies' (op. cit.) where he complained of the 'extra-ordinary artificial, repetitive style, quite different from anything else now existing in English Literature.' (p.64). In Orwell's view they were potentially dangerous because their stories supported contemporary hegemonic or nationalistic positions. Orwell saw them as purveyors of reactionary politics. One clear example of this role was the Captain America stories (*Marvel Comics*) where the superhero arrived to help the US forces in their defeat of Nazism, and later Communism. In contrast, the comic form can also be seen as potentially subversive and liberating for its readers, even if produced within the commercial world. Eco (Apocalypse Postponed, 1994, p. 39) saw the comic form as "bound by the iron rule of the industrial-commercial circuit of production and consumption . . . destined to give sometimes unconscious, sometimes programmed paternalism," but also capable in the work of Jules Ffeiffer and George Herriman of developing "language so incisive, clear and effective as to dominate all the conditions within which that language must operate."

The potential to subvert, to be oppositional, can be clearly seen in comic genres which more overtly challenge mainstream cultural mores. It is from the tradition of satirical and scatological comics, like *Mad*, (Dexter and White, 'Teenagers, Satire and Mad', 1964) *Viz* and 'underground' comics, which appeared in the Sixties and Seventies, that non-commercial forms have emerged, giving voice to disenfranchised groups (Selwood and Irving, 1993). The comic therefore holds a place in the cultural triangle between liberal forms, reactionary texts and counter-cultural ideas. It suggests that it is not merely a tool for providing reading matter for those with low levels of reading ability, or for confirming stereotypes and reactionary beliefs,

but an expressive form which at its heights can be as sophisticated and as liberating of ideas as any recognised literary or art form.

The legitimising of the study of popular cultural forms, particularly in Cultural and Communication Studies courses, combined with the extension of work in semiotics has meant that there has been an academic as well as educational interest in comics. These have celebrated as well as criticised the comic. The history of comics has been covered by writers such as Perry and Aldridge (1967), Carpenter (1983), Drotner (1988), Benton (1989), Hoult (1989) and O'Sullivan (1990). The development of artistic styles has been described by Sabin (1996) and Eisner (1989). Others such as Martin Barker (1984; 1989) have looked at comics from sociological, political and ideological perspectives. The earlier social critics, such as Orwell, were later joined by writers such as Dixon (1977) who still saw comics as tools of hegemonic control and Smith (1972) and Brian Thompson (1988) who attacked national and racial stereotyping made in comic stories, whilst feminist researchers, including Cadogan and Craig (1976), McRobbie (1978), Walkerdine (1978) and Sharpe (1977) highlighted the gender stereotyping to be found in these forms.

Comics were also criticised because it was claimed that they caused or confirmed illiteracy (Pumphrey, 1964; Wertham, 1955). In contrast to this criticism, comics have also been seen as potentially helpful for reading programmes. Work has been done on their educational use in the main stream of education, such as by Moss (1981) and Meek (1991), whilst in an article in The School Librarian, Plummer calls Asterix 'a challenge to the liveliest mind.' They have also been used in marginalized areas (Selwood and Irving, 1993; Krashen, 1987). These studies have generally made either or both of two assumptions. Firstly, that popularity with young people indicated the comic's potential to encourage interest in and engagement with reading and with education, and secondly, that the comic's most effective use might be with early readers, the disaffected and low achievers. The latter assumption is presumably based upon the belief that comics would be more accessible for these types of student because comics are visually more attractive than books and appear

easier to read, having more pictures and fewer words. Thus, perhaps unconsciously, they conform to the Pumphrey-style prejudices against comics.

The conclusion from these studies could be that the main readership for comics is amongst the less able. Such assumptions about who reads comics can be challenged by looking at the research which over a considerable period of time has consistently revealed that comics are not the sole domain of those with low literacy levels. Jenkinson (1949) discovered that “boys who read the most bloods<sup>4</sup> were the ones who generally read a great deal and also read a variety of texts”, (Barker, P., 1982, p. 25). Similarly a survey in 1967 by the National Association of Teachers of English in Warwickshire found that most children read comics and magazines (in Reading for Meaning Vol. 12 pp. 57-62). Additionally they reported that those who read the most of this type of text were [surprisingly] not from the lower band D and non-examination groups. This indicated that good readers, who did not have to rely on easy reading, enjoyed comics even more than their less able counterparts. A similar survey was done in 1972 (Taylor, ‘The Reading of Children’s Comics by Secondary School Pupils’). In the edition of 8th August, 1994 The Guardian reported on another survey that again indicated that comics were still a basic diet for children (Davis, ‘The Literature Kids Love’). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that for all types of readers comics have provided a way into other forms of literature (Bookshelf, BBC Radio 4, 7 February 1993) and libraries have begun to promote them. (Barker, 1993). Many competent readers, besides Orwell, when acknowledging their history of reading and reading pleasures, have included reminiscences of comics.

It is clear from what has already been said that the use of the graphic story in the classroom cannot be isolated from the debates around popular culture, literacy, education and the pleasures of the readers. What types of pleasures are there in reading comics? Is the pleasure the comic gives partly to do with the subject matter, much of which is quite banal although there are examples of acerbic and challenging texts, or with the style and form? Is it the freedom associated with a less repressive

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Bloods’ was the nickname given to comics with violent themes.

form that provides a different kind of reading pleasure? Is it that by combining pictures and words comics are just easier to read than books? All these questions are relevant and tantalising, but the focus here is to be upon the last question about the reading process. Are they just easier to read?

If we consider that comics have the possibility of merit and are not necessarily “intrinsically ‘commercial’, mass produced for a lowest-common-denominator audience”, (Sabin, Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels, 1996) then how can they be effectively used as texts in education as Carpenter suggested? Even though there have been frequent attempts to legitimise the comic form as a relevant aspect of children’s and adults’ literacy (Winwick, 1964, Roux, 1970, Taylor, 1972, Moss, 1981, Krashen, 1987 and Selwood and Irving, 1993) the use of comics in education still remains problematic involving as it does value judgements made on cultural assumptions and different definitions of literacy. (The critical debate on literacy is taken up in Chapter 3.) This may actually be counterproductive because it can cut out possible resources for developing reading skills, in the widest meaning of that phrase.

## Comics and Reading

We know that the brain has two separate ways of processing information and perceiving ‘reality’, one verbal and analytical and the other visual and peripheral. The left hemisphere controls the analytical and sequential, whilst the right is holistic thinking and therefore controls the visual and spatial capacities (Nodelmann, Words About Pictures, 1988, pp. 197-8). These factors influence learning styles. There is a general assumption that textual literacy has to be taught whereas visual literacy is inborn. This myth has been challenged on many levels from art history (Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 1960) to art education, (Allen, Teaching Visual Literacy, 1994); from textual analysis (Barthes, Mythologies, 1973) to social semiotics (Halliday, Language as Social Semiotic, 1978), but it is still a generalised belief that has influenced the perception of comic reading.

The usefulness of combining words and images in conveying meaning in forms such as picture books (Morris, The Illustration of Children's Books, 1955), instructional leaflets and visual aids (Marcel and Barnard, 1979; Macdonald-Ross and Smith, 1977) is perhaps self-evident. This has probably been based upon the same premise that pictures are easier to 'read' than written text<sup>5</sup> and that they can therefore be used to help understand such elements as narrative structure and deliver complex information.

One personal example of applying such an assumption was in teaching in a Junior School where a survey had identified a substantial number of below-average readers on entry.<sup>6</sup> To remedy this situation rapid intensive teaching tactics were employed. One of the devices used to encourage the development of reading was that of cloze procedure and on occasions comics were used as the study texts in this work. Their use was the result of the common-sense assumptions discussed above with reference to the discourse around comics. Firstly, that the images would help the reader's comprehension of the narrative and therefore improve comprehension and fluency in reading. Secondly, again part of the same discourse, that as comics were popular with children for recreational reading, to use them as a teaching tool might turn these children back onto reading. Because of the special circumstances of this group of children there was closer observation of how the children were developing their reading than perhaps in a normal teaching group. This study was re-visited (Chapter 2) as part of the development of the methods that were to be employed in this present study.<sup>7</sup>

Another personal example of the use of comics in education was whilst working with adult students under a reading programme established through the Government's Adult Literacy Campaign.<sup>8</sup> I found the use of the graphic novel to be stimulating for

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<sup>5</sup> Perry Nodelman (1988, p 5) refers to this assumption, but questions the implication that pictures are merely illustrations or decorations which, 'put no stress on the mind' because they are more directly read.

<sup>6</sup> The Early Reading Survey 1969-70 conducted by The Reading Centre, Reading.

<sup>7</sup> This bald summary obviously begs many questions. Further discussion can be found in Chapter 2 Preliminary study 1973 and in Appendix 4.

<sup>8</sup> See Velis (1990) for an account of this programme in the U.K. as well as in other countries.

students. This raised similar questions: Was it the novelty of using the form for learning? Was it the more adult content of the graphic novels that were not usually available in other Adult Basic Education teaching material? Was it the pleasure of a more open and less repressive form? Was it the interaction of signifying systems that helped students? Or was it a combination of many factors, some of which were not obvious? For example, was it merely that in proving to individual students that they were literate, if not in conventional terms, it provided them with the confidence to re-assess their own competencies?

An illuminating discussion will serve as an example for the latter point. Linda was a mature student from the Caribbean and Mandy was a younger adult. Both were on re-training courses. When they had read Briggs' graphic novel on the Falklands War, The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman, Linda concluded:

"Nationalism is the infantile disease, it is the measles of mankind .... it reminds you know not to be greedy ....share ....let's compromise, you know, let's sit down and talk this over.....this is what this book ...reminds me ....to do if you are forgetting yourself."

Mandy: "that's right, you think to yourself well, let's not make the mistake that they make...." <sup>9</sup>

The use of metaphor and alliteration and the understanding of this text is profound and certainly not at the level of illiteracy, lack of comprehension or critical ability in the formal sense. This is just one example how the smallest signal could effect a change in thinking about reading processes. If students could understand texts at this level, was the form important in helping understanding? What metalinguistic skills had they used for reading and comprehension and were they transferable skills? For the education community there has always been the challenge from those like Mandy and Linda who have experienced education not as liberating, but as a site of struggle against dominant practices and discourses.

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<sup>9</sup> further details are given in Chapter 2 and Appendix 5

## The theory of relay with text and image

Within the maelstrom of these half-formed ideas, questions and thoughts which had been circulating within and around the practices of teaching and learning, it was the work of Roland Barthes in his collected essays, *Image, Music, Text* (1977) which suggested, through '*du choc des idées*', a possible explanation of some of these questions. Barthes had stated in 'Rhetoric of the Image', that:

“In all cases of anchorage, language clearly has a function of elucidation but this elucidation is selective, a metalanguage applied not to the totality of the iconic message but only to certain of its signs ... The text has thus a *repressive* value”. (ibid. p. 40)

Barthes' statement refers to a particular combination of image and word where the latter is designed to limit (or anchor) meaning rather than to allow the free flow of associations and imaginative play between image, text and reader. We can see this in the anchoring of images in photojournalism. There are many apocryphal examples of the meanings of pictures being altered by captions to fit a particular news value.<sup>10</sup> For Barthes the image has a 'naturalizing function' (1977, p. 51). In his analysis Barthes was interested in the way that these could create levels of meaning that would be ideologically weighted. He suggested that the image is structurally divided between the image as a system of culture and the image as a syntagm of nature (or naturalised). For example, in *Mythologies* (1973) Barthes had looked at the way other texts such as advertisements or star images created meanings which were inevitably given mythic status through anchorage and cultural reference.

In the comic, where the extended narrative (diegesis) is the dominant meaning, Barthes saw a different relationship between the verbal and visual languages when signification took place. Semiotics could illuminate this process, but the actual event took place at the supra-textual level. Here there was a free flow of associations and imagination almost impossible to separate into individual acts. Barthes describes this

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<sup>10</sup> The *Independent on Sunday*'s Poll Tax Riots (Colin Jacobson) discussed in *Reportage*. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)

particular relationship in which written text and image are complementary when he says that the words and images “are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realised at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis.” (1977, p. 41) To paraphrase Barthes: where there is the articulation of these signifying systems constructed from different signs there is required a synthesis for meaning. This involves a more ‘costly’ investment by the reader in understanding than when the linguistic message is used to anchor an image.

This concept of ‘relay’ or switching between text and image also appears in other studies. For example in the following quotation we have the phrase ‘*va-et-vient*’ (come and go) which implies a similar process:

*“tout est mis en oeuvre pour donner au récit une haute charge de représentation visuelle, immédiate, essentielle. . . . La lecture des bandes dessinées est un va-et-vient continuuel entre l’image et la parole: même si la plus forte impression est donnée par l’image, qui captive dès l’abord l’attention, c’est le texte écrit qui précise et met en ordre le déroulement de l’action. . .”* (M. Welke, in Roux, 1970, p. 114)

(everything that is put in the work gives to the reader a considerable concept of representation, which is visual, immediate, essential . . . The reading of graphic novels is a continual coming and going between the image and the word: even if the strongest impression is given by the image, which captures the first attention of the reader, it is the written text which is precise and puts into order the unrolling of the action.)

The idea of relay between signifying systems had also been discussed by Christian Metz, (Film Language a Semiotic of the Cinema, 1974; Langage et Cinema 1977) and in Mascelli, (The Five C’s of Cinematography, 1965) with relation to film. Metz suggested that each system plays against the other to provide a unification so that each incomplete system, as part of the whole, is ‘destroyed’ to create the new



synthesis. Barthes suggests this relay-text becomes very important in film “where dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action”. (1977, p.41) Obviously there is a difference in their application of ‘*relais*’ but both Metz and Barthes were talking about a process which required the decoding of separate signifying systems and their re-articulation to provide a synthesis. The questions these implied were: What is this process of switching or ‘relay’? Can it be observed in the way readers read comics?

If we take the process of relay as a concept explaining the means of switching between codes, it provides a possible way of understanding that the reading of comics with narrative requires different metalinguistic skills from reading other texts with images. It suggests a different type of reading and therefore reading pleasures and knowledge from that associated with an illustrated book or the anchored photographic image. This difference in process as well as effect is therefore a starting point in thinking about how readers read comics.

## Comics, Readers and Literacy

Work on literacy and reading has historically focused on words and the medium of print. This is inevitable given the educational, economic and political paradigms which have generally believed that literacy could only be judged by competence in written or spoken forms<sup>11</sup>. Following work by such people as the art historian Ernst Gombrich (1960) and semioticians such as Umberto Eco (*A Theory of Semiotics*, 1976), Kress and van Leeuwen (*Reading Images*, 1996), Fiske and Hartley (*Reading Television*, 1978) and the work of John Berger (*Ways of Seeing*, 1989) and Roland Barthes (*Image, Music, Text*, 1977), we now understand more about the complex process of reading images, semiotic analysis and ideological significance. In our increasingly multi-media society where text, graphics and images are linked through a digital revolution, (Lister, M. *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, 1990) the complexities of the combination of the different reading processes involved

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<sup>11</sup> Literacy models are discussed in Chapter 3.

provide a field for further investigation and cross-fertilisation with that of the psychology of the reader.

Researchers into reading processes have developed different approaches depending upon their particular focus and upon the models they have adopted. Comprehension and decoding skills are important, but this study takes a broader view of reading beyond the words on the page. Thus recognition of the work done in narrative as well as reader response informs this study.

Barthes suggested in 'Rhetoric of the Image', that the narrative, the diegesis, should be treated as an autonomous system. In understanding narrative there is the work, amongst many others, of Genette (Narrative Discourse, 1980) who looks inward to the structure of the text for meaning and Barthes (S/Z, 1975) who categorised five codes looking outward towards the implication of the text within society. In Wolfgang Iser (The Implied Reader, 1974) and Louise Rosenblatt (The Reader, The Text, The Poem, 1978) the focus is on reader response and the psychology of the individual. All provide discrete foci on readers, texts, style and form. Is it possible to combine or extend these structuralist and culturalist approaches to provide a framework for understanding the process of weaving a narrative from both non-linear and linear elements to include both the structures of the languages used and the reader's responses and uses? This study provides a possible method to assess this process which aligns with Halliday's (1978) view of language as a social semiotic. Halliday's work sees language not only as a sign system in the pure Saussurian (Course in General Linguistics, 1959) view, but also part of the wider systems that are used to convey meaning. For Halliday the meaning of language is not 'free-standing' but dependent upon the situation and the culture within which it is used. McLuhan, in his famous aphorism, 'the medium is the message' (Understanding Media, 1964, p. 7) also suggested that the delivery system of the message helps to make the meaning of the text and this is yet another dimension.

In summary, two interlocking elements can be seen to underpin this study: firstly, Barthes' process of relay or switching between the verbal and the iconic in reading

narrative in the comic texts; and secondly, the reading practice and experience of the participants, that is their responses to the texts.

In this research Barthes' theoretical concept of a process of relay and the analytical tool of semiotics were also juxtaposed (clashed) against the practical use that had already been made of comics in teaching. But there was another significant practical influence. This was Antoine Roux, (*La Bande Dessinée, Peut-être Educative*, 1970) whose book proposed some of the possible teaching strategies with the comic and revealed some of the depth and sophistication of this form. Roux' reasons for writing this book were related to the debate around the relative value of visual and verbal languages. He remarks that (and here I paraphrase my translation) humanist Europe did not want, nor could support, the idea that the sacrosanct word would find itself reduced to the level of a servant of design. In other words he suggests that the reason for the low status assigned to comic form is related to the ideological supremacy of words and those in charge of words within a culture, rather than to its intrinsic value and literary merit. Roux suggested that the category of students classed as non-conceptual by psychologists would find it easier to access concepts through images. Roux believed that in the *bande dessinée* the combination of text and image had found an equilibrium, "*visuelle, immediate, essentielle*," (ibid. p.114) that would particularly aid this group, as well as other readers. In other words he also implies that images are helpful, perhaps because they are easier for certain styles of learning. Here he follows Barthes' idea that, "the image being analogical the information is then 'lazier' . . . the less 'laborious' system" (1977, p.41). This is why he felt that the graphic novel was 'perhaps educative'. Like others it is based upon the assumption that pictures are easier to read. In section three of his book Roux suggested many teaching strategies using the *bande dessinée* claiming here that the *bande dessinée* plays a very important homeopathic role in the learning of narrative techniques. This was in contrast to traditional complaints against them, which, even in France with its strong *bande dessinée* tradition, had been influenced by the campaigns in the USA and Britain.

In the western world literacy education traditionally begins with pictures. This generally assumes that visual literacy exists naturally or is easily learnt. This

assumption has been challenged. Evelyn Goldsmith refers to psychological research “that what is often called ‘visual literacy’ cannot be taken for granted, even in twelve-year-olds” (quoted in Nodelmann, 1988, p. 37). In picture books images do “begin to limit the possible meanings of mutual correction, since words and pictures give us different insights into the same events ... Reinterpret ... but without ever forgetting that pictures and text are separate and different ...” (ibid. p. 243) Pictures provide information on style and form and from these we begin to understand the text. Rather than anchorage, as Barthes suggests, Nodelmann appears to be saying that pictures and words in picture books act in counterpoint. This differentiates them from the process of relay or switching required in reading a comic, where each system apparently profoundly modifies the other in a *‘processus de relais’*. We experience texts, especially those we read for pleasure, without necessarily appreciating what is involved in understanding. In order to cast light upon the process it meant un-picking the skills employed by readers and observing the understanding gained as they read. So there was at the beginning of this study, ‘provisional speculation claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice’ (Stenhouse, Research as a Basis for Teaching, 1985, p.142) of how this process worked in reading comics.

## **Research and the Classroom**

Research questions like these do not appear as if in a bottle washed up on a convenient, but random institutional shore. Kuhn’s critique of positivist and empiricist epistemology highlights this point by focusing on the concept of a paradigm of researchers and research shaped by the communities, both research and social, in which they work. This paradigm also provides the framework for classroom research (Usher ‘The Philosophical Context for Research, 1995, p. 8). In this study there were several frameworks. Some came from the practical work of teaching literacy; others from that provided by the theoretical propositions of concepts such as ‘relay’, language, social semiotics; and finally some involved the skills and knowledge of the students. There was no simplified plan, ‘so that people know exactly where to dig trenches without having to know why.’ (Stenhouse,

Authority, Education, and Emancipation, 1983) All research obviously demands integrity and rigour, but in a classroom with all its innumerable variables there are particular constraints involving students as well as the obvious contextual difficulties integral to a real rather than experimental situation. The classroom is not a laboratory and conditions cannot be exactly replicated, which would be necessary for the experimental style of research. Collecting the data in as natural a setting as possible but also efficiently meant taking into account external factors, such as when the students in this study switched into other conversations or when personalities began to clash, which could influence the basic material. They partly explain the varying and individual nature of the readings. This type of study therefore relies partly upon the integrity of the observations and the writer's interpretation of the data rather than its purity of form; and by definition one way of seeing must imply alternative ways of seeing. These issues are central to this study.

### **The Organisation of this Study**

The study is divided into three parts. The first covers both the practical experiences of using comics in the classroom through the description of earlier studies (Chapter 2) and the theoretical debates around literacy and reading, which are covered in the literature review (Chapter 3). It uses a semiotic model for understanding the features of the comic texts (Chapter 4). In their different ways these areas contribute to the insights and understanding of the empirical evidence produced in the field research described in Part Two.

In the second part there is a discussion on various issues that arose in designing this research (Chapter 5) as well as the report (Chapter 6) and analysis of the readings of a range of students in post-16 education (Chapter 7.) The research question which wanted to understand how readers read comics is explored here. This section develops the idea of reading processes that are consistent with the different foci discussed in the analysis (Chapter 8.) From this work it becomes clear that reading, which combines and switches between both depiction and description as a holistic act, is dependent upon the coherence of the text, its semiotic consistency, and the

reader reaching a critical point of understanding through their skills, knowledge and imagination. This involves both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning.

The final short section (Chapter 9) brings the study back to where it started, the classroom, and underlines the points made throughout the study that literacy is a complex concept and that states of literacy have many dimensions. It suggests that forms which provide experience of the lexis and grammar of visual and verbal languages, as in the comic, may have a legitimate place within the educational reading profile of students in today's increasingly complex world of communication. We know that in our society not being able to read written texts has social and economic disadvantages, (Cipolla, 'Literacy and Development in the West' 1969; Velis, Through a Glass Darkly, 1990) but Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that "Not being 'visually literate' will begin to attract social sanctions. 'Visual Literacy' will begin to be a matter of survival, especially in the workplace." (p. 3, Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design, 1996).

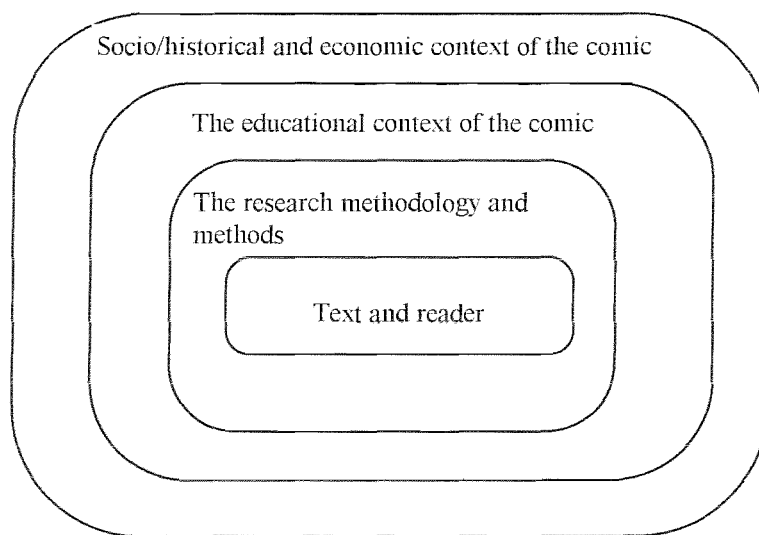
I have therefore explored some of the issues around the use of comics in education that have centred on the question of literacy and whether different types of literacy have equal value. The relevance to the question of the reading of comics is in the way that literacy is related to both the text and the practices that have merged around a concept deeply embedded in our lives and ways of thinking. The types of literacy to which we are exposed, both formally and informally, are significant, they have a social weight, they interpret our experiences and our construction of reality. (Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, 1957) A personal literacy profile should not be narrow or one-dimensional. It should enable readers to make sense of what goes on around them through all modes of communication. This study has particular relevance to those students who find themselves inflicted with the term 'illiterate' when in fact they exhibit many forms of literacy, but it is also relevant to all levels of readers where knowledge of self contributes to understanding of text.

To summarise: The methods employed in this research are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The theoretical issues, which are discussed in this introduction and in Chapters 3 and 4, are considered in the light of the practice within the classroom and

the educational use of the comic in Chapters 2 and 9, situated to emphasise the importance of the educational framework for this work. The central part of this study is the analysis of the data in Chapters 7 and 8. The aim is to compare readings across a range of abilities and so reveal the process of reading. It provides a method by which comparisons can be made between reading styles of different readers based on the recorded data from a controlled exercise, and in Chapter 8 it proposes models from this information.

The following figure illustrates how the text and readers are central to this research, that they are set within an educational context, but are constrained and constructed by external factors.

*Figure 1.1 The research structure*



This introduction has provided an overall view of the background, theory and context of the research question. The next chapter reviews some previous work within the practice of teaching reading and working with comics. It discusses different research designs and helps to justify decisions made for the final research methods chosen.

## Chapter 2

### Background to Research : Previous Investigations

#### Introduction

The previous chapter shows how my interest in comics and their use in education arose in part out of a theoretical background, but also from the practice of teaching reading in a variety of contexts. The writers who were most influential in suggesting different ways of understanding texts were Roland Barthes, Ernst Gombrich and Ferdinand de Saussure. The writers who began the interest in looking at the reader beyond the skill of decoding were Mary Warnock (1976) with her book on the imagination and Rosenblatt and others who have worked upon the response of readers to texts. But the people who were most involved in developing these ideas were the students with whom I was working. This chapter reviews some of the previous work I had done with comics in the classroom and which, for a variety of reasons, was formally recorded and reveals some of the background to the research methods employed in this study.

In using comics in the classroom I made certain assumptions which I suggest are ones that are still common and current today. Firstly that children find reading comics easy and enjoyable. Evidence for this can be seen in many primary schools where the wet playtime box is full of well-worn and ancient comics. This is because teachers have made similar assumptions on how and why comics are read. Playtime is for play not for work, for relaxation and enjoyment, and therefore ‘easy’ reading is made available. The comments from the Learning Support Services<sup>1</sup> students in the pilot project reflected these basic ideas of enjoyment and easiness. For example, Ian wrote, “I usually read comics when there’s nothing on TV or when I go up to bed”; Kevin wrote, “I read it when there is no-one around”; and Chris said, “when the mood is right”. Tracy on the

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as LSS in this study.



other hand, who indicated that she had read Beano and Tintin comics, wrote that she no longer read comics because “I think they are boring”, whilst Carrie, who was unhappy because she had been parted from her ‘friend’ wrote that, “I feel that comic/comic book are rubbish and they are for baby’s [sic]”. Much of the work around comics when used in education is based upon similar views to those expressed by these students. The fact that these responses were given within the physical context of the classroom and to a particular audience, ‘a teacher’, does beg the question of whether their responses would have been similar if talking only to themselves or to each other. Would they have identified other reasons, or uses?

There can be seen reflected in the views of comics expressed by these students a confusion between ‘popular’ and therefore morally harmful, and ‘easy’ and so educationally harmful. This does not only apply to these types of students who have special educational needs. Sixth-formers on A-level courses often claim that as children they were not allowed to read comics by their parents. The reasons given usually involve similar ideas that comics are believed to have a harming influence on young readers, for either or both of the reasons discussed above. These myths around questions of literacy and media effects still persist even though comics may now be superseded by videos and computer games and therefore no longer the popular focus for mass criticism.

A second reason for using the comic is that the almost universal pleasures of reading a comic mean that all students have had some exposure to the form. Even if parents had banned comics, friends would normally supply their deprived peers. This forms a commonality of knowledge which is often used culturally and intertextually. It is not only with younger children that this experience is current. Comics are still used as part of a reading experience even with sixth formers. When I ask students what reading material they are carrying in their bags comics often feature as part of the leisure reading for these more academic readers. They are often scatological and oppositional to the ‘correct’ theories being taught in class. It is also noticeable that when comics are

introduced into the class for study purposes an unnatural silence descends as the students become absorbed in reading the comics. If they are only for children, ‘rubbish’, ‘boring’, why do such academically able students read comics? Are they being read because they are regarded as easy reading, or do they give different types of pleasure?<sup>2</sup> Are they harmful in effect and in process?

A third aspect which connects with the choices made above, and is therefore part of the popularity and the pleasure of the form for children as well as adults, is, as mentioned before, the ability of the comic to be subversive. In children’s literature it is the child protagonists who are fore-grounded, and in comics they more often get the better of the adult figures of authority. The adult comics which challenge the status quo and dominant beliefs have a similar iconoclastic function. We have already noted that comics, being priced within the limits of pocket money or low incomes, come within the purchasing power and therefore ownership of less powerful economic groups. These factors perhaps more than their apparent ‘easiness’ may partly account for their position in the market of children’s reading and may also account for their use in such projects as the *Crisis* comics, *Mailout* and *The Monster Comic*, which have an adult and alternative audience.

A fourth assumption which was influential in the decisions made about the use of comics in this research is that the reading processes involved with the comic provides a freer, less repressive regime for readers. They are therefore able to reach the highest level in outcome without having to trip at the first hurdle of decoding. The assumption is that non-conceptual learners are better able to understand a text with iconic forms of language. (Roux, 1970) This is why in the projects discussed below students who had been judged to have reading difficulties were always part of the design. It was also an effect of the type of student with whom I was working. In retrospect, this proposition regarding the contribution to reading for ‘*non-conceptuels*’ may not appear so convincing. What is certainly seen is that the ‘poetic’ nature of the form, its mixture of

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<sup>2</sup> Implied in these responses are issues such as gender which I have not addressed.

linear and non-linear, the parts and the whole, require particular decoding skills using different styles of reading quality from those of other types of texts. These areas are discussed further in the review of literacy, reading theories and textual analysis in the next chapter.

The fifth assumption is that there is an obvious link between the design of a comic narrative and a film narrative in the way that time, space and narrator positions can be manipulated. The fact that the comic foreshadowed the language of the moving image and is at the interface of the visual and verbal<sup>3</sup> was therefore felt a possible positive help for readers in understanding texts. Weak readers often find causal links difficult to judge in narratives. If they could use knowledge of the visual language and the semantic and syntactic cues it may possibly help in understanding how the narrative structure works.

These then are some of the assumptions on which the following studies were based. By analogy we can link the approach to Halliday's model of language which is based upon the idea of a 'social semiotic perspective'. Halliday terms these perspectives as ideational, interpersonal and textual. Thus, readers' ideas as they re-present their views of the world presented by the comic; their interactions with their peers with whom they are asked to work and to discuss the comics; and the specific structures of the form with which they were asked to work are the three interdependent parts comparable to Halliday's perspective. Halliday's concept of social semiotics and the principles of context of situation and culture are again more fully discussed in the next chapter.

In order to fill in the background to the final field research and the methodological decisions taken for this research, the following section summarises two small-scale investigations undertaken in 1973 and 1989 and the pilot study undertaken in 1993. Further information on each of these is found in the relevant Appendices (3, 4 and 5). The rationale behind the inclusion of these summaries is based upon the following points:

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<sup>3</sup> Lacassin (Roux, 1970) '*La branche mère*' the comic, '*une aborescence annexe*' the cinema'.

- They show developmental stages in the use of comics in the classroom.
- They show different methodological approaches.
- They reveal methodological issues which have been taken into account in the final design of this research. That is they are helpful in understanding the decisions which were made regarding the methods and tools finally employed in the study.

The first study (1973) was done whilst teaching a class of ‘remedial’ readers aged nine to eleven years. The aim in using comics with this group of children was to try to encourage different reading strategies and enjoyment in reading. Its focus was on the traditional children’s comic story format. In the 1989 study, rather than the skills in reading, the study focused upon the responses from a range of readers to a whole text. In this case a complete graphic novel was used. The third study looked at the processes used to read comics and employed different methods to assess their effectiveness and to identify the research methods and tools to be used in the final study. This was done in 1993.

## **Cloze Procedure Study 1973**

*An investigation into the use of context cues in comics using cloze procedure (1973)<sup>4</sup>*

### **Introduction**

This investigation was part of research into comics undertaken as part of an Open University Reading Development Course. It is included not only to provide background for an historical context, but also because it uses a particular method. It highlights some of the reasoning behind the methodological decisions which were made in the final research.

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix 3 Cloze procedure research.

Cloze procedure was devised by Taylor (1953). It involves deleting words in a text in a systematic way, for example every fifth word. The reader has then to provide appropriate words using the context to help. Cloze procedure has been used to measure readability and comprehension, as well as learning.

In providing a possible insert for a deleted word there are obviously several cues which will operate simultaneously. The two main forms are the syntactic and the semantic. In the comic these account for cues both in the written text and the image. The syntax, or order and grammar of a language, help a competent language user to limit the possible choices to a particular part of speech. The semantic cues use the meaning generated in the context and also previous knowledge to limit the choice of possibilities. The cues are not necessarily read in an order of left to right, even though text is linear. The reader may have to move forward and backward in the text to pick up references. As the reader continues through the text, and if they have understood the cues correctly, then the possible inserts become more limited. If there have been miscues then there is the possibility of reinforcing the error leading to a cumulative misunderstanding.

“There are two aspects to be considered. One is the language experience of the reader. The other is the language of the material read. The greater the discrepancy between the two the more difficult the reading becomes ... If the patterns of language structure are not familiar to the child he cannot correctly anticipate with reasonable success then he is habituating himself to neglecting context cues and consolidating habits of word by word attack. By so doing he is learning positively not to read fluently.” (Merrit, 1969)

If Merrit is right then the comic with its emphasis on the spoken word, with the ellipses natural to spoken language, should match the knowledge of the reader more closely than the formal structure of language found in the reading scheme book.

Thus the research began with the assumption that although the grapho-phonic (primary skills) are of importance, the use of syntactic and semantic cues (intermediate skills) is also of importance for fluent reading. By using the combination of linguistic and visual cues found in comics, the pleasure reading of many children, “The literature under the desk” (Hindle, 1971), the use of cues could be identified. If the skills involved with paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices could be transferred to other texts it might help develop reading fluency.

### **Conclusion**

For the less able children it was easier to insert missing words in the controlled vocabulary and structure of a formal text which had no visual cue than in a comic. Even though these children might have chosen to ‘look at’ comics for pleasure, it is possible that their reading of the comic might often have been miscued or have been selective. Comics required the reader to use context cues efficiently and to read vocabulary and structures which required knowledges such as cultural and symbolic knowledge, as well as intermediate reading skills as defined by Merritt. The comics employed also had a style which was elliptical and required cognitive leaps of the imagination.

Further informal study with this group of children found that children with a reading age (9.5) at just under their chronological age at this point (i.e. year 6), found this an easier exercise than those who had a significantly lower reading age. This was in face of the assumption that the pictures would aid the less able children’s comprehension by providing other ‘easily read’ visual cues. As Merritt (1969) states, “The essential basis of the intermediate skills is the ability to respond simultaneously to a variety of kinds of sequences.”

It is also linked to the types of knowledges<sup>5</sup> that are required by the form. Problems in completing deleted words would probably have been more easily solved in a more ‘controlled’ text. The comic with its varied culture and vocabulary requirements

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix 1

provided a more difficult read. It was also more difficult to provide accurate and acceptable substitutions using arbitrary deletions. This, it is suggested, is because of the lack of syntactic coherence, and because the weaker readers were not able to use the visual and verbal codes switching simultaneously at the higher level.

## **Reader Response Study 1989 <sup>6</sup>**

*A summary of a small-scale research project done as part of a taught MA(Ed) at the University of Southampton.*

### **Introduction**

“Fundamentally, the process of understanding implies a re-creation of it ...” Rosenblatt, (1970, p.113).

In this second investigation the approach formed part of a study into reader response rather than looking at particular reading skills. This time, rather than a single page comic story a complete graphic novel was used, *The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* by Raymond Briggs. Although the subject matter of the topic, that is that the victims of a war are the innocent with whom leaders of nations play war-games, is universal and trans-historical, there was also obviously a certain topicality in the choice. The book was based upon the Falklands Conflict (1982), which was still in the foreground of collective memory if not in particular terms. Again different pairs of students were asked to read a text and respond to it in various ways. This time the responses were formally recorded on audio tape for later transcription.

### **Background**

There have been many studies on how readers respond to texts. There are obvious landmarks in this area such as the various works of Richards, (1924) Iser, (1974, 1978,

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix 4

1980) and Rosenblatt, (1970, 1978, 1985). These writers have looked not only at the prose form, but have also investigated how readers make meaning when reading other, less linear forms of literature, such as poetry. These studies have provided more insights into the ways readers approach texts. Iser talks about the inferential gaps that a reader has to fill, and these are, although not as Iser originally meant, particularly obvious in the elliptical style of the comic. Rosenblatt refers to different styles of reading, (effort and aesthetic) and in her transactional theory she describes how the text and reader work together to create responses. This type of analysis is significantly different from the single perspective 'literary' or as Eagleton (1983) suggests the 'Leavisite' tradition, "a disciplined attention to the words on the page ..." (p.32). The purpose of this investigation was to try to record the reader's response whilst they were reading a graphic novel which involved 'words on the page', but much more besides.

### **The investigation**

In this investigation the respondents were asked to read and discuss the story with guideline questions. These were recorded and then analysed and evaluated using the following criteria: description, assessment and evaluation, personal response, question and answer, transcription and interpretation. These categories were qualitatively biased, but they were identified in retrospect after analysis of the transcripts. This allowed the categories to be established by the readers not by the researcher. In quantitative terms, an analysis of the number of references to words and pictures was also made to compare responses across abilities. This was an attempt to see if the weaker readers would 'read the pictures' rather than the words on the page.

### **Conclusion**

Unsurprisingly, the adults responded at a higher level of understanding of the underlying meaning of the story than did the younger children, even though the adults had comparatively lower literacy levels. Obviously it can be assumed that their life experiences were greater and therefore they had more knowledge about the topic of war which they were able to bring to the text. One boy's father had been in the navy and



had recently died, so that his response is more empathetic to the text than that of the other children, but it must be seen within this personal experience. The resulting inferential style of reading with this text may have created understanding at no loss to literal comprehension and possibly some gain (see research quoted by Pearson 1985, p. 452).

The taped discussions showed how the readers were able to read by using cues at various levels: contextual, semantic, syntactic, forward and backward cues, cues across-sentence and graphic cues. An analysis of their responses into the words and pictures revealed that Linda and Mandy, the adults, veered off the actual text into personal reflection, and in percentage terms had only half the number of directly related textual references than did the boys.<sup>7</sup> This was interestingly also the style of the LSS students in the main research.

The styles of reading these texts where readers were asked to respond rather than to answer questions, developed more evocation and critical comments. In some debates about literacy, this is regarded as the most important literacy development (see for example Freire's work, 1970, 1972). Often this ability is not taught in conjunction with early reading skills. If teachers are concerned with early skills such as phonetics, or 'word by word attack' (Merritt) they may ignore this important element in reading for understanding and for critical awareness.

It was found that free discussion rather than prescriptive 'comprehension' questions allowed students to ask questions and propose possible answers which were relevant to their reading of a text and not to that imposed by the teacher. This confirms the research done by John Teasey in his work with students reading poems, "Their agenda for the discussion was very different ..." (Benton *et al.*, 1988, p. 36). Teasey discovered that the agenda set by the readers of the poem 'Song of a Dying Gunner' was to share "their private responses" and explore "personal associations", not to

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix 5 figure 5.1

discuss language and form in the initial stages. The strategies that the readers adopted in his research, “appeared to be as rich and complex as any carefully nurtured response” (p.38).

### **Pilot Study 1993 <sup>8</sup>**

*A preliminary study undertaken with learning support students (special needs) in a sixth form college.*

#### **Introduction**

The two previous studies had revealed various problems in using the comic form which were practical, textual and contextual. The aim of the pilot project was to look at other approaches to observing slow learners' responses to reading comics. As I was intending to use a range of readers at different literacy levels in the final research, it was essential that I developed strategies that could be used with all the respondents, and particularly with those students who would be the weakest readers.

It was also necessary to consider methodological issues and to investigate both the practical constraints involved with each method employed with regard to the final research design and the theoretical underpinning of each. The initial impetus had been to establish how the use of words and image as found in comics could develop literacy skills. It was necessary to define the methods that would help to answer the research question of how readers read comics and to identify what would be a manageable research project in the context of the classroom. Additionally the design needed to distance the teacher from the researcher to provide a critical as well as a personal response. These were small-scale qualitative studies in the classroom, and the involvement with the topic and the teaching obviously created the danger that the focus could slip. These issues are further discussed in the Chapter 5 on the field research.

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix 6 Pilot Study 1993

## **Background**

In order to work with this group of students, it was felt to be beneficial to spend an extended period of time with them in order to achieve a teacher/student relationship. The other identified research groups would already be in my established teaching groups.

This preliminary work was therefore undertaken to establish a method that would provide material from which an understanding of reading and comics could be theorised. It was also used to discover the best possible tools for working with students with whom it would be the most difficult to establish a working relationship. The LSS group eventually consisted of seven students, four males and three females, aged between 16 and 19 years. The students were selected by a member of the LSS staff, whose criteria were: that they had no major physical handicap; that they would be able to work with a ‘stranger’; and that they had basic literacy and verbal skills. I worked with them for nearly two terms for one hour per week.

## **The Investigation**

During this time various methodologies from different disciplines were applied. These included a semiotic approach, a reader response approach, and a narrative structuralist approach. These are discussed in more detail in the literature review. In order to apply these certain methods and tools were tested. These included: open-ended discussion; questionnaires; interviews; exercises to reconstruct narratives from individual pictures with and without linguistic clues; looking at cause and effect through narrative reconstruction; producing comic stories; recording talk, identifying comic signifiers such as speech bubbles; looking at the way images use a language of representation, visual metaphor and so on. Each of these sessions was recorded on tape and then transcribed, and the material produced by the students was collected. The responses showed the difficulties of trying to understand the way that these types of readers approach a text by using time-honoured data collecting methods, such as questionnaires and interviews. A

more detailed discussion of the research decisions made as a result of this work is found in Chapter 5.

## **Conclusions**

During the process of working with these students it was shown that it was possible to improve understanding of the strategies, the use of frameworks and knowledge of language. This work provided these students with more sophisticated reading skills. Although this was not the purpose of the project it was an effect that was visible over the two terms in the students' choice of language and the way they developed their own narratives.

It was also noted that a certain level of reading age i.e. RA 8+ with intermediate skills was necessary for readers to be able to understand these. Those students who had the weaker linguistic skills were also those who found the combination of visual and verbal cues more difficult.

The pilot study was small and raised many ethical questions. How could I remain an observer, when I was being drawn into the social, personal and educational circle of the subjects used for this research? Was it necessary to remain detached or should I 'teach'? Would it be more fruitful to analyse the texts rather than the readers' responses? Had I made incorrect assumptions? Would it be possible to develop a strategy and a method that could be used with different levels of readers to show how readers read comics? It was as a result of tackling questions such as these that future decisions for the research were made. Thus the pilot study was a useful exercise in that it highlighted many significant factors that could then be accommodated into the final design.

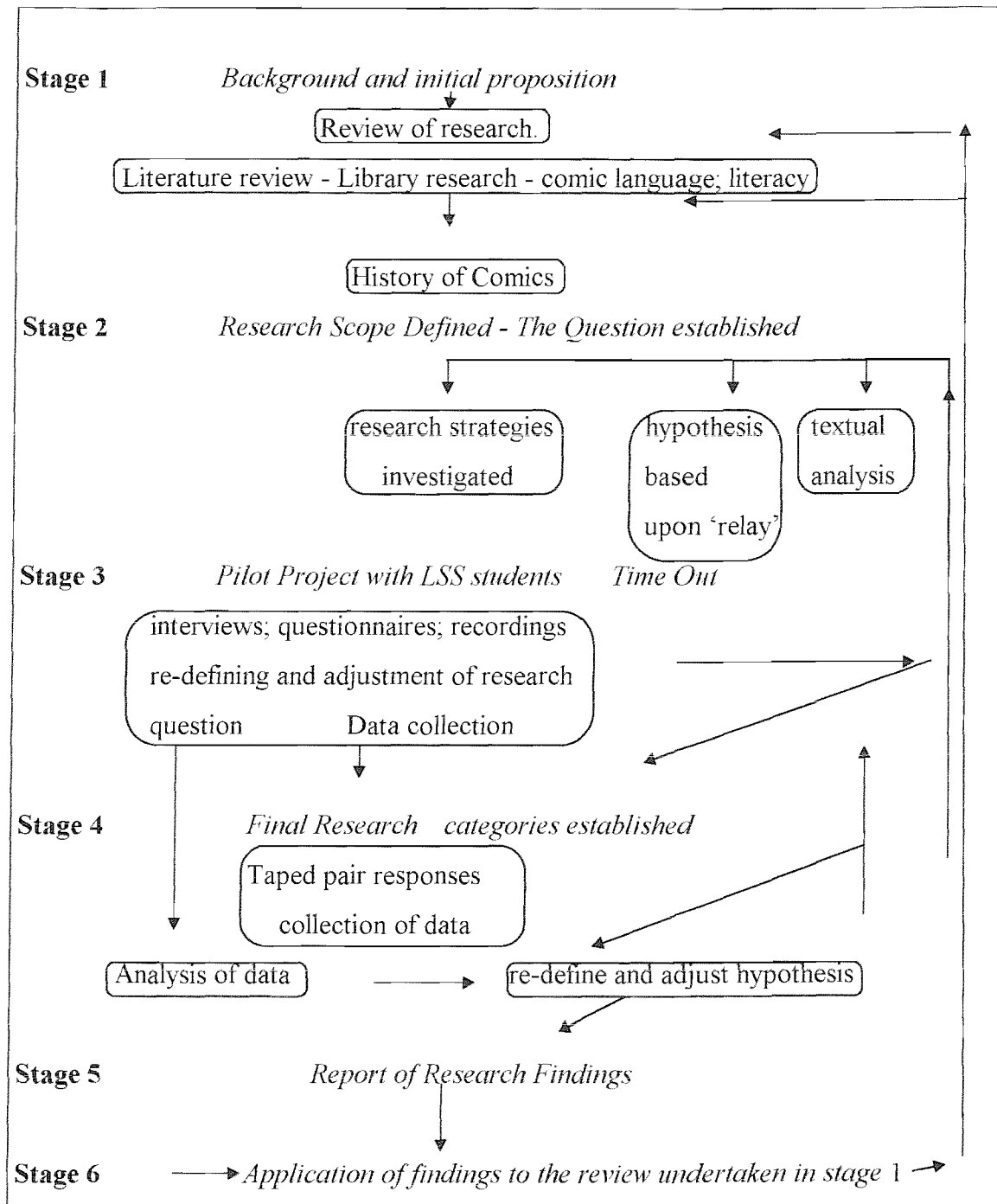
## **Summary**

These three small-scale investigations provided experience in handling data, as well as involving a variety of perspectives on reading comics. They employed different methods, such as recording talk and grammatical exercises, which were based upon different methodologies, and therefore the results gained were not directly comparable. They did provide some evidence of reading strategies and styles.

This chapter has shown some of the possible approaches to working with comics. It has also revealed some of the practical issues involved with methods based upon different methodologies. Consideration of these will be taken up in chapter 5 on the field research. In this study I am concerned with the question, how do readers read comics? In chapter 3, the literature review, there is a discussion on the four identified areas of research; literacy, reading styles, textual analysis and the reading context. The review shows that even though there is significant material on each of these areas, there is very little experiential evidence on their application to reading comics.

The following figure summarises the stages in the development of this study.

Figure 2.1 Development of Final Research Methods



## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This research is concerned with the process of reading focusing specifically upon how readers read comics. In considering this question a variety of methodologies and theoretical positions were examined. This chapter reviews relevant work in these areas with some of the tensions and debates involved. Firstly, it looks at literacy through definitions which involve both cultural and social practice and the social discourse in which the comic and its readers are situated. These areas are considered important because reading is part of a social interaction and thereby relevant to a reading community and the construction of its reading identity, which are enforced through education and play a dominant role in society. Next it reviews some of the literature on reading styles and the differences between reading visual and written texts. This involves theories on languages, grammar and the reader's cognitive and affective responses to texts. The final area is that of textual analysis. Like the reader the text is constructed within a social semiotic of sign meaning (Halliday, 1978; Kress and Leeuwen, 1996) in which the writer of the text collaborates in creating coherence and meaning with the reader.

In all these areas different methodologies have emerged. These have been dependent upon the types of evidence being gathered. In general we can see the quantifiable forms emerging from studies which have wanted to consider macrocosm of literacy forms or of language structures, but which inevitably fail to see the particular within the general. On the other hand we can see evidence from examples of research within the microcosm of individual communication. These have tried to reflect the richness of the texts and of the readings, but may not be able to make generalised assumptions from these particular readings. The different positions which are

discussed below can be seen to be dependent upon, as well as the methodological cause of, the way in which the evidence was gathered for each.

## **Perspectives**

Literacy underpins all questions of communication. Any definition of literacy is difficult because it is used in many different ways by different groups. At the minimum it may be seen as involving a simple decoding act, but for others it may be a complex interaction of ideas, interpretations and responses. For example, literacy for the early school leaver may involve participating in skills workshops to complete a form while for Higher Education students literacy could involve an esoteric discussion on an existentialist novel. Both are seen as acts of literacy, but their underlying values are very different. Additionally the use of comics in education is a challenge to another perception of literacy, that is that literacy is about reading good books. The literature review considers these different approaches to and definitions of literacy. It discusses the significant characteristics of the various literacy models and reviews the rationale for each model. It critically evaluates them with reference to the reading of comics and to the educational context of this research.

However we define literacy, in performing the act of reading it is the structure of the text which demands particular cognitive functions. (In this discussion I am using the word ‘text’ to discuss forms which can be produced, or reproduced, on paper using words and images, rather than the wider meaning of all artefacts which can be used.) It is assumed in many studies that the ability to access different cognitive functions may account for differences in reading achievements. Bernstein (1971), for example considered that the social context, or ‘class’ influenced linguistic styles and therefore the ability to read certain styles of text. The review looks at theories of different reading styles and cognition. It specifically references those which discuss the signifying systems of images and words and the tensions apparent between the relative legitimacy of each. It relates these to the combination of word and image in the particular form of the graphic or comic text.



Barthes' concepts of relay and anchorage are relevant to this debate. One aspect of Barthes' work was that he saw images and words as interdependent. Kress and van Leeuwen see the visual and verbal as distinct although related "even when something can be 'said' both visually and verbally the way in which it is said is different." (1996, p.2) which points to "different interpretations of experience and different forms of social interaction" (ibid. p. 2). Although acknowledging their debt to Barthes, they believe that Barthes' account misses out the fact that "the visual component of a text is independently organized and structured" (ibid. p. 17). These different perspectives involved in reading texts and reading images, with the particular focus of reading comics, provide insights into understanding the processes involved.

As a single theoretical position may hide rather than explain what is actually happening the aim here is to critique various approaches to studying reading. It also looks at those critical areas which support or illustrate the proposed models in this study, and which have not previously been considered with particular reference to reading comics.

The review has been structured to cover the following areas: first, the different models of literacy; second, the reader's styles, strategies and skills in decoding; third, the form of text constructed from verbal and visual signifiers; and finally the text as part of a social, cultural and economic context. These are obviously not discrete areas and will be cross-referenced where necessary. The specific presentational features of the comic form are covered in Chapter 4.

## **I Literacy**

Is the comic a literate form? Where is the comic positioned in the literacy debate? In Chapter 1 there is an overview of the positioning of the comic within paradigms of social and educational references. In its style, mode of address and form the

discussion uses language that is alien to its actual subject, which is the popular cultural form of the comic. Its purpose is to address an audience with a particular discourse and is in itself an example of a cultural as well as academic construction of literacy (Ivanic, *Writing and Identity*, 1998). It is this type of tension between definitions and values that underlies the following discussion on literacy.

The narrow definition of literacy is the ability to decode or encode written text with varying levels of efficiency. The inability to do this defines the reader as illiterate. As a definition it excludes any other forms of communication. Debates and theories around literacy have focused upon this definition, and it is still the dominant form used when discussing literacy, particularly in an educational context. But definitions of literacy are bound by societal and personal values which are contextually and historically specific (Vincent, 'The assessment of adult literacy in the United Kingdom', 1986). These factors have contributed to a complex relationship between literacy and education. In the United Kingdom mass education began during the latter part of the nineteenth century if not without some resistance (Williams, 1961). Whereas in previous generations the ability to read was not necessarily a requirement for social interaction, now the opposition between concepts of literacy and illiteracy began to be used pejoratively (Williams, 1976). Education for the masses was related to movements to standardise provision, but in a perverse logic this standardisation also led to claims of mass as being of lower value.

Today reading print is still the dominant form of literacy, even though the focus of being literate has been broadened to involve discourses that do not rely totally upon words on a page. Disciplines such as sociology, art history and anthropology have opened up the discussion beyond that of linguistics and the ability to use written text. These views have broadened literacy to involve the wider context of reception and consumption in which the acts of communication are set. This has also involved a wider view of language and thus a definition of literacy which includes the ways that different languages, including visual language, are used (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The complexity of this concept of literacy is appreciated if we consider the many different forms of communication that involve activities that could be termed as literate. These include pictorial, oral, written, print and audio-visual forms of

communication. We judge people to be more or less literate in these forms according to agreed sets of conventions and criteria. In practice these merge into and overlay each other.

The value attached to the different systems by a particular group provides a gate-keeping function that is fundamental in constructing definitions of literacy in society. The different semiotic systems involved are therefore not arbitrary nor neutral in their conveyance of meaning. One well-researched example of the change in organisation and relationships within society as a result of the changes of literacy, systems and styles is that from oral to literate societies (Ong, 1982; McLuhan, 1964). More recently as new forms of communication such as computers and interactive media have emerged in industrialised and post-industrial societies, there have again been changes which involves culture, ways of seeing, as well as concepts of literacy (McLuhan, 1962; 1964; Graddol et al, 1987; Barker, 1989).

Like other semantic ‘hot potatoes’ literacy, as we have seen, is not a neutral word; it has considerable ideological weight. The common sense and popular meanings associated with literacy have involved not only the ability to read at a functional level, but also of being well read at a cultural level (Williams, 1976). If we take these ‘common-sense’ definitions and apply them to reading comics we have to ask if this is functional or personal literacy, or neither? The banal content of comics has often been criticised, (Orwell, 1946; Barker, M., 1984) as has the effect of such perceived ‘easy’ reading (Pumphrey, 1964; Andrews, 1997) on the skills of readers. Therefore in both views of literacy, that is of being well-read and having the ability to read, the form of the comic has been seen and is still held by many to be problematic. This is in spite of firstly the broadening of the definition to include visual and graphic forms (Andrews, 1997; Eco, 1994 and Twyman, 1987); secondly the support given by writers such as Umberto Eco, who called Charles M. Schulz, the creator of *The World of Charlie Brown*, a poet “more so than many others” (1994, p. 45); and finally their popularity with readers.

One example of attempting to define a non-written form is that of Bertin’s (1984) semiology of graphic signs. He divided signs into the general categories of

monosemic, polysemic and pansemic. In another study, Twyman (1987) looked at different forms of graphical representation of ideas and he defined graphical literacy as the ability to interpret and use any type of representation of ideas or concepts that depart from the linear form of written language. Twyman produced a schema that attempted to include all types of graphic language, such as images, diagrams, figures and symbols, into a matrix. The effect of drawing up a matrix “enables us to see points of connection between different areas of graphic language that are normally seen as discrete and that our traditional attitudes and terminology encourage us to keep separate.” (p. 119) It may be that these ‘points of connection’ are what help readers to understand texts where different systems are combined and it is one of the purposes of this research to see whether such connections are made in the comic.

Perhaps the most fundamental change instigated by electronic technologies and new media is to a more graphic literate society. Such forms have proved efficient in conveying information and communicating ideas. In most developed and developing areas they are now the dominant form for many readers. In addition to any internal models of literacy, now that literacy is inextricably bound up with these technological modes of communication, it offers the possibility that the control of the electronic media by a few rich countries or conglomerates may lead to their global domination of knowledge. The consequences to human interaction as a result of ‘globalization’ has been much debated within the media. Others have a less deterministic and monolithic view of these developments. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that European regionality is a counter-balance to increasing globalization and this means that “they will use ‘the grammar of visual design’ differently” (p. 4). But even they agree that “The dominant visual language is now controlled by the global cultural/technological empires of the mass media” (ibid. p. 4). If we take either the narrow written form or the broader definitions of literacy and being literate these developments must be acknowledged as part of the literacy debate.

The complexity of understanding literacy is compounded if we also consider the more specific social situations and psychological dimensions of literacy events. We can define three research areas which have considered these areas. First, there is

literacy as a response to an articulated text. This gives a psychological dimension to literacy. Whilst we consider literacy in reading and writing as basic to our function in society, in other areas of the world people exist on levels of literacy which we in our post-industrial society would call illiterate, but they still respond to texts with as much psychological depth. Second, we can identify literacy as a social process. We understand that there are different levels of literacy events and skills required depending upon a specific role or purpose. Therefore literacy defined as a social practice is relative, and such models of literacy can only exist if based upon their social application. Finally, we can take a model which looks at the skills abstracted from the context in order to understand the cognitive processes involved, that is, in terms of research, study literacy as a cognitive 'event'. The differences in approach account for the tensions between the various claims and the different conclusions of each approach.

In this discussion literacy as a social practice is a thread which runs throughout, but for the purposes of the research the two definitions of literacy which have been used are that of literacy as a measurable event and literacy as a response articulated through a text. The first is the system of decoding symbols. This may be externalised into speech or retained internally. This act of de-coding does not imply comprehension. It is a definition of communication that de-contextualizes literacy. The second is that literacy can be defined as creating meaning from language. This implies interpretation and not necessarily accuracy. Its purpose is to communicate not only words on a page but ideas. If we took the first definition of literacy we would consider that many of the readings in the accompanying transcripts, even those from the most able readers, are illiterate in that there are significant de-coding errors. If we take the second definition we might consider that even the readings of the weakest readers had levels of literacy as they revealed purpose and relationship with the text and the listener. But it may be that these definitions are not mutually exclusive, for each cannot by themselves provide an adequate account of literacy and reading strategies. This research has therefore tried to focus both on the nature of the text formed from visual and verbal signifiers and the various means by which the readers have approached each of the texts. It has also more specifically considered the educational and social context of reading comics.

Having looked at the many ways that the concept of literacy has been defined and used, it is necessary to clarify the different models which each articulates. The following section considers each model and how they connect with the reading of comics.

### **Literacy Models**

In 'global' terms there are three basic models of literacy at the supra-level. These are the ideological model, the economic model and that of literacy as an autonomous function. Each model is influenced by the others but skews the emphasis depending upon the definition of literacy used and the identified justification for literacy. We must also be aware that the empirical evidence suggests that definitions of literacy as used between groups are a matter of agreement and are therefore liable to vary and so deny any one particular absolute position as allocated in the global definitions, (Goody and Watts, 'The Consequences of Literacy', 1972).

In the ideological model literacy has social uses and consequences beyond its interpersonal use. Literacy campaigns in countries such as China, Cuba and Tanzania, are used to build national identity and therefore have overtly built upon the ideological model. For example in Cuba after Castro came to power, illiteracy, which had been widespread, was almost totally eradicated within two years (Kozol in EH207 :22). In Brazil, Paulo Freire (1970; 1972) also associated literacy with power and developed his literacy campaign on this. Others have sought ideological explanations for differences in uses of literacy within societies and the subsequent disadvantage felt by identified groups. Heath (1983) used an ideological model in her study which explored the consequences of literacy styles for children in three different communities. Earlier studies had also considered literacy as having social effects. Bernstein, in his study of different linguistic styles within different groups, actually entitled his work Class, Codes and Control, (1971).

For agencies such as UNESCO it is the economic benefits rather than ideological consequences, both for underdeveloped countries as well as for the pockets of

underprivileged peoples in the developed world, on which they have based their literacy campaigns. The view that raising literacy levels must bring economic benefit is generally held to be self evident. But even supporters, such as Fisher ('Illiteracy in Context', in Mayor, B.M. and Pugh, A.K., 1987) are often more circumspect in their belief of a direct cause and effect; "Eliminating illiteracy will not automatically eliminate poverty, deprivation and sorrow . . . illiteracy must not be viewed as a problem in isolation" (p. 406). Levine argues that functional literacy as supported by UNESCO brings groups who were previously autonomous under forms of bureaucracy; "It appears that a functional competence has been defined so that it is merely sufficient to bring its possessor within the reach of bureaucratic modes of communication and authority." (ibid. p. 434) This means that as a liberating economic or social force literacy can be counterproductive and may have ideological effects if not purpose. It is therefore disingenuous to believe that raising levels of functional literacy will lead to social integration or personal development. In contrast, people who stay outside of the dominant literacy paradigm may not be economically deprived and may be inaccessible to the centralising force of literacy campaigns. The economic model of literacy based upon the de-contextualised forms of reading and writing, isolated from the real world of people's actual use, fails to identify the ideological consequences of literacy. One could consider that radical comics are an example of literacy able to work outside the economic hierarchy.

In the autonomous model the type of literacy we use, as Ong and others would claim, changes the way we think and communicate. Ong suggested that "Readers whose norms and expectations for formal discourse are governed by a residual oral mindset relate to a text quite differently from readers whose sense of style is radically textual" (ibid. p. 171). Oral discourse is perceived by Ong as a 'rhapsodic form' that works on formulae and elaboration in a real world of communication. In his exploration of the changes which have resulted in different communication systems Ong stated that "oral composition does not show straightforward narrative 'line' as much as in written composition as its organisation is on 'informational cores.' " (ibid.)

McLuhan (1964) was also interested in the changes that were linked to different forms of communication. He implied the fundamental adjustments which are necessary in moving from one form of literacy to another when he discussed the differences between oral and literate culture as described in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India, which he saw as illustrating "... the inability of oral and intuitive oriental culture to meet with the traditional, visual European patterns of experience" (ibid. p. 15). The 'blindness' was probably mutual. Work done by researchers such as Carothers (1953) has also revealed the differences between oral and literate culture. McLuhan saw a similar movement with the introduction of the medium of film which "carried us from the world of sequence and connections, into the world of creative configuration and structure . . . of transition from lineal connections to configurations". (1964, p. 12) This model of literacy therefore suggests that literacy has an autonomy beyond its ideological and economic uses. The divide between the context-dependence of spoken language and the context-detached nature of written language has been challenged. It is an effect of defining context as being immediate, whilst de-contextualisation is seen as distant in time and space. In fact the latter is just another context (Ivanic, 1998).

Having established the three main positions with regard to models of literacy and pointed out some of the tensions, overlaps and contradictions between them, this review now considers the relationship between language and literacy. In this the focus is on the social aspect of language that transcends the arbitrary nature of language. It takes further some of the discussion already touched upon above. It considers some of the aspects of language and literacy that are directly related to developing models of how readers read comics.

### **Literacy and Language**

Literacy must involve language. This statement begs the question of what constitutes a language and language use. In this discussion I shall be referring to images as well as words as a language. The issues raised during the following discussion relate to the reading of comics, drawing upon ideas, methods and theories from linguistics and education. This very breadth could create fragmentation when



used within a single discourse. On the other hand it may actually help to synthesise ideas by seeing overarching connections. It is this concept of connections which has influenced the method of approach and the analytical framework used within this research and which is the focus of this review.

As mentioned above, disciplines such as literature, sociology, linguistics, psychology, cultural studies and media studies have their own approaches to literacy and language, if not without much debate. “We know that linguists refuse the status of language to all communication by analogy ...”(Barthes, 1977, p. 32). In addition, as already noted, the concept of literacy has been expanded to include other forms of communication such as oracy, visual literacy, graphicacy, numeracy, and more recently computer literacy, all of which claim to have different languages with their own systems and conventions. These new notions of literacy have appropriated the concepts and theory of language and have frequently based their analysis and claim upon a linguistic model. It is semiotics, the science of signs (Saussure, 1959) which has made this appropriation more effective. Saussure stated that language should be studied “not only in terms of its individual parts, and not only diachronically, but also in terms of the relationship between those parts, and *synchronically* ... language should be studied as a *Gestaltseinheit*, a ‘unified’ field, a self-sufficient system, as we actually experience it *now*.” (pp. 19-20 in Hawkes, 1977) Saussure’s contribution therefore was through his insistence that language has an abstract set of rules but that language only exists in the relationship that develops as the rules are used and applied. Although Saussure focused on the internal structure of language his theory did allow for a social dimension that was explored by later students of semiotics. Barthes, for example, considered that all languages have ideological significance that is socially created. In the development of this research question within the discussion framework, it seems important to focus upon both the system which creates meaning and the context in which it is read.

The social view of language often emphasises the use of reading as a tool, as a means of accessing different texts for a range of purposes. They see reading variously as a response to a text, an articulation of that response, a social practice, a

literacy event, and a part of the technological and economic extension of the mind (McLuhan, 1964).

Ethnographic researchers such as Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Heath (1983) have stressed the value of studying individual and societal beliefs about language. The variations in the value attached to forms of literacy and the function of switching between uses in linguistic styles are seen by these researchers as culturally variable. The differences in consciousness, in modes of thought, cognitive styles, use of image and icon, and the different types of oral and literate forms used in different social contexts are revealed by their research.

Heath (1983) observed that in Roadville, a white-working class community, children did not experience de-contextualising knowledge. Similarly the stories experienced by Trackton children, a black working-class community, did not provide them with the expectations of mainstream white schooling. Heath noted that ‘mainstream’ children had the faculty to work in a de-contextualised way through the opportunities they had to use the symbolic potential of language. Heath pointed out that there are other ways of acquiring language competence and that the essayist tradition of mainstream culture was not self-evidently the best. She quoted as evidence the example of the Trackton children who had learnt through a style of literacy which involved analogy in oral story telling. These skills were not rewarded at the early levels of education. By the time these qualities were being rewarded at the higher levels of schooling the children had already mentally opted out of education. Tizard and Hughes in similar ethnographic research, investigated literacy events in the home and at school amongst four-year-olds and revealed a complexity of linguistic styles even in homes that might have been illiterate in conventional educational terms.

Socio-linguists (Bernstein, 1971; Labov, 1973; Trudgill, 1974; Halliday, 1976; Fowler, 1981) have explained variations in functional uses related to the social context. They have analysed styles, registers, dialects, and semantic codes and suggest that the meanings created are social differences. “. . . literacy is a *social*

practice, the history and character of which necessarily reflect the prevailing political and structural realities.” Levine (1986, p. 437)

It is often easier to see this in relation to a culture at a distance, for example in the way that the cultures of previously colonised countries in Africa have developed along linguistically hierarchical lines. In Mali the industrial and urban workers use French, whilst the rural communities use the local language Bambara. The split maintains the commercial control of the previous colonial power. This problem of language is discussed by Souleymane Cisse, the Malian film director, in relation to the production, distribution and control of his films (Ashbury, Helsby, O’Brien, 1998). In this way the indigenous language begins to diminish in its power to communicate at an economic and political level. There are many other examples of this process of marginalising minority indigenous languages, such as Welsh and Breton.

Freire (1970, p. 1) noted, “education is a cultural action for freedom ... leading not only to their [the learners’] acquisition of literacy skills, but more importantly to their awareness of their right and capacity as human beings to transform reality”. But it can only transform their reality if it is within their language community. The control and power is also in the messenger and the message. Freire regarded the ability to de-contextualise through language as leading to social and cultural power and therefore through conscientization to ‘cultural capital’ and the possibility of subordinate groups to think their way out of domination. He therefore believed that intervention was necessary for literacy.

Other researchers have worked towards an understanding of linguistic styles affecting literacy levels although without the same polemical focus. Bernstein (1971) suggested that socialisation controls the access to “relatively context bound or context independent meanings”, which he called elaborated or restricted codes. Bernstein’s work has been criticised for not allowing for different criteria for literacy in differing speech communities and has been challenged, for example by Labov (1973) and in Cooper (1984). If we take the hypothesis of Bernstein that context bound meanings will help certain reading styles, we may consider that the less

restricted and formal styles of the comic may aid reading for particular social groups. This of course does not allow that rather than a social group it is a learning style which may be the dominant factor. Bernstein's theories also reflect the perception that comics are easier because they are more context bound through the use of pictures and therefore there is a reduction in the required linguistic, de-contextualised, knowledge.

This debate about levels and types of language is fundamental to reading a text. Do we assume that readers who are 'non-conceptual' are going to find reading comics relatively easier, because pictures contextualise, than more de-contextualised and abstract forms? Or is this because these readers follow a more oral mindset based on 'information cores' or 'rhapsodic structures' and in the autonomous model therefore relate more easily to this style of text; as Eco termed it a poetic style? Alternatively, do we take the ideological model suggested by ethnographic researchers such as Heath? This suggests that readers who have engaged in styles of literacy not accredited by formal education can access and respond to these texts more easily. This is because they are within a style of literacy and speech community more attune with their own literacies. This not only depends upon the cognitive demands of each system but also, as some researchers claim, on the different styles as well as purposes of communication systems within different cultures and thus the motivation of the user. Included in this is the semantic language resource that is a product of socio-economic structures in which users live. The hypothesis of Sapir-Whorf goes as far as to suggest that language actually creates a world view. They alerted researchers to the way that culture through its patterning of relationships effected patterns of syntactical and semantic usage which they claimed had cognitive and linguistic significance. From this viewpoint language acts as a structuring principle that creates a reality for the language user. For example, in Hopi, a North American Indian language, time can only be expressed as 'subjective duration-feeling', so you cannot identify a specific moment instead you state "while the summer phase is occurring". (Whorf, 1956; in Cherry, 1985, Communication Studies) Similarly, Dorothy Lee (in Explorations in Communication, 1960 (eds.) Carpenter and McLuhan, pp. 136-54) suggests that reality is "differently punctuated and

categorized by participants of different cultures” and that this was achieved through language and “other patterned behaviour characteristic of this culture.”

This concept of language constructing reality for its users would explain how different uses and different channels of language create significantly different styles of literacy. We have seen that researchers such as Ong considered that the transition from predominantly oral to literate societies makes a fundamental change of mental organisation. They see oral societies as aggregative rather than analytical, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced and situational rather than abstract. In Bernstein’s (1971) work we see an attempt to find out what mechanism allowed an individual to develop more ‘complex’ powers of reasoning and abstraction. That is when speech frees itself from the ‘homeostatic’ state (Ong) to a system that points to ‘alternative realities’. But as Shirley Brice Heath (1983) suggested in her work with different literacy communities this may be a misconception or a flawed definition of literacy and language use.

Thus the definition of literacy as a construct or absolute state depends firstly upon the model used and secondly upon how it is used by society and therefore by education. We have seen (Tizard and Hughes, 1984) that the definitions of literacy adopted by schools and by education departments have not always reflected the literacy beyond the school gate. As an obvious effect of this we can judge the relative success of attempts to introduce other forms of literary texts into the examination of English. These have often been undermined by the emphasis on a literary canon as a definition of literacy even though the literary canon is never permanent. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that English supplanted the study of classics as the form for being literate or ‘well read’ (Fowler, 1981, p. 185; I.A. Richards, 1924). The implicit assumption of any canon is that the texts chosen are the only ones worthy of study and therefore other types of texts are by definition inferior. This of course is not to argue that all texts have equal value, but it does beg the question, which media studies has often had to answer, about the relative values of texts and whether one medium is more literate than another. Is a text as a drama on television as worthy as a theatre production? Some styles of analysis have tried to address this problem. Others have moved beyond this debate.

Todorov (cited in Fowler, 1981, p. 185) stated that “the structuralist analysis of literature is nothing other than an attempt to transform literary studies into a scientific discipline.” As part of the formalist movement in literature Todorov saw ‘literariness’ as the focus of discussion, rather than a concept called literature. It focused on the form rather than the content. It was this attempt to raise the debate beyond that of the quality of the text to its structure that helped to re-focus the literacy debate in other media. Such a proposition is useful in this study in that it takes us beyond the criticism of the content or literary value of comics and on to the structures of depiction and description (Goodman, 1985) and the similarities and differences between visual and verbal meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). It also makes available the possibility of conclusions beyond the specific form and process of reading comics.

## **II Reading texts**

In any explanation of reading the relation between theory, experiment and real world application is intricate. There are two basic approaches to reading. Firstly, the study of discourse and of readers in culturally situated contexts using particular knowledges. This could be called the process approach. Secondly, the textual approach model looking at the properties intrinsic to the style and form of the text. The value of each approach must be assessed on how far it relates texts, and readings of those texts, to a complexity of context, interactions and knowledges. It is then that they become part of a considered unified discourse as well as discrete models that reflect the methodological approach of each.

Symbol systems differ and they call for different kinds of mental activity and cultivate different levels of mental processes. The structure does not stand separately from its content. The methods of analysing structures can reveal symbol systems that convey meaning with different and specific effects. The kinds of skills, such as mental processes and mental transformations, are determined by the symbol system and therefore outcomes in decoding the systems may vary. The explanation

of the process depends upon the link between the reading skills and the language structure.

Given that language and behaviour are based upon culture and are presented through codes which are categorised differently because of cultural differences, this means that we have to encode our culture and experience. We then need to decode these messages with all their complexities. Hawkes says decoding “may be a misleading term here for it suggests that there exists an ultimately ‘uncoded’ message . . . maybe a better term would be ‘re-code’ to fit the categories we have for it.” (1977, p. 104) So the message is not transparent but translated.

### **Cognitive and metacognitive models**

Researchers who have followed this route have tried to look at units and patterns for decoding skills from a relatively abstract viewpoint to try to understand the mental processes and skills involved in reading. That is they have wanted to understand and explain how readers decode the abstract symbols and subsequently encode for meaning. One example of this is Chomsky’s (1964) surface and deep structures of codification which makes the act of reading explicit in a purely taxonomic form. In this taxonomy the first stage of de-codification, or reading, is descriptive. This preliminary focus on surface structure leads to a second and fundamental stage, the comprehension of the deep structure. By understanding this the learner can understand the dialectic between the categories presented in the surface structure as well as the unity between the surface and deep structure. Chomsky’s model of transformational grammar was an alternative to the psychology of language, a change from a behaviourist to a cognitive view of language. Chomsky’s work suggested a system of competence (*langue*) which must precede and generate performance (*parole*).

If language systems are connected to other systems that are themselves culturally and socially located, then an exercise in producing a deconstruction rather than a synthesis model becomes difficult to sustain, as Chomsky later acknowledged. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) in their review of text linguistics concluded, “We

end up having classifications with various numbers of categories and degrees of elaboration, but no clear picture of how texts are utilised in social activity”. (p. 23)

Gombrich (1960) in discussing visual language divided the rule system, the grammar, from the social context. He made a distinction between competence, understanding the rule system, and performance, the use to which this system is put. It is the latter that controls the potential for literacy in a cultural context. More general cognitive development needs to precede skill cultivation and he suggested that skill cultivation by tutoring would develop the integrative information and use of symbolic modes.

Beaugrande and Dressler conclude this point by suggesting an evolution of research which “shifts the operation of transformation from its original domain of syntactic level only and allows transformation among different levels. . . . Van Dijk expands transformations to describe cognitive processes that can render texts ‘literary’ or produce summaries” (1981, p. 28). Language systems are seen to be culturally and socially located rather than totally dependent upon arbitrary structures, and a model of reading as a decontextualised skill is seen therefore to have a limited application. Research has also indicated that reading comprehension consists of synthesis (integration) rather than analysis (de-composing) ideas. There are models, such as Barrett’s ‘taxonomy of reading comprehension’ and Robinson’s refinement of Gray’s model, which recognise the inter-relationship between the skill of reading and the art of comprehension. (Melnick and Merritt, 1972, pp. 56-60)

Metacognitive researches such as Pearson (Mayer and Pugh, p. 448), and Hall (1987) Yetta Goodman (1980, p. 31) have emphasised procedural knowledge of how readers engage with a text. As well as the individual’s knowledge, the informational frameworks and the cultural factors which a reader brings to the text, there are the skills required for knowing how to approach a text. One emphasis has been upon awareness, monitoring, control and evaluation, with techniques such as SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite, review). Pearson’s survey of research into comprehension concludes, ‘Approaches that emphasise students’ awareness of their own strategies suggest alternative strategies and help students learn techniques for



self-monitoring, result in sizeable gains in comprehension performance.’ (1985, p. 452)

Bruner (1964, quoted in Salomon, 1981) regards the development of metacognitive learning as “skills transmitted with varying efficiency and success by culture - language being a prime example” (p. 1). They activate certain mental skills that have universality and then cultivate specific skill mastery. Thus we all have the ability to talk but we need to learn the skill. In terms of reading metacognition explains how readers know when to apply certain skills. This includes reading strategies such as which reading technique, for example skimming or scanning, to use, or how and when to use different systems when they are combined. It includes how to self-regulate reading behaviour and apply reading skills. It helps the reader decide how to approach a text.

It is the mastery of these and similar skills that allows for efficient decoding. Gombrich suggests that this indicates that learning has occurred because resemblance occurs between a symbol and a mental reconstruction of its referent, not directly between the symbol and referent. This theory, which indicates a necessary process of maturation and development, may explain why certain readers are unable to read apparently simple picture narratives. (Salomon, 1981, p. 218-9)

Salomon produced a spiral model to illustrate the relationship (1981, p. 241) between each of three factors, cognition, skills and environment, as these undergo changes and they reciprocate developments. Cognition grows, skill mastery improves and the environmental inputs are perceived differently, thus leading to further cognitive growth. As coding elements become internalised the new mental tools open different and higher levels of understanding, and additional information can be gained from codes that were previously ignored. This concept of reciprocity and cumulative knowledge constitutes the basis for the core and spiral periphery model discussed in this research. The use of schemata and cognitive frames is also considered in this research in relation to the core and spiral periphery model. The research indicated how different aspects of the processing, the text structure or the reader’s knowledge structures, were used at different points in the reading and

therefore created reciprocity. “The logical status of text sense simply does not emerge unless we consider its interaction with the users’ prior knowledge” (Beaugrande and Dressler, p. 25).

This accords with the view that “Developing and extending literacies involves [rather] the creative re-production of socially available practices and discourses for new purposes as they arise in people’s lives.” (Ivanic, 1998, p. 69) From this perspective Gombrich’s view of learning and acquisition of language is seen to be too instrumental. Kress and Leeuwen (1996) also argue that each individual creates their own literacy and language resource from their own map of knowledge rather than learning or acquiring a finite piece of knowledge.

Thus metacognitive procedures lead to models of reading that use schema theory and prior knowledge structures. Nickerson provided a list of the types of knowledge or schemata required for reading which help readers to develop language competence (Appendix 1). Research in other media, such as that of Salomon (1981) and Lawrence and Mace (1991) in television, have confirmed that schemata are built up both via experience and cognitive maturity which generate understanding of when to use certain methods. In the visual arts Gombrich (1960) had considered how a ‘mental set’ based upon previous schemata allows a reader of a picture to make sense of the various codes used by the artist.

Marvin Minsky (1975) took this idea of schemata and suggested ‘cognitive frames’ as a development of the schema theory. For Minsky a frame was “a network of nodes and relationships”. It is essentially controlled by stereotypes which show characteristics that are essential and/or variable. A further elaboration is a script of a story which pre-determines the sequence of events likely to happen. (Schank and Abelson, 1977, in Graddol, p. 203) Competent readers are able to access the relevant schema or cognitive frame and make reference to similarities or relationships between their previous understanding and the text they are reading using stereotypes and scripts. It is thus a dynamic, interactive process.

These approaches to metacognition suggest that in order to build a picture of the process it is necessary to try to reveal how and if readers are applying or accessing any particular schema. In this study all the participants had experience of the comic and so had a common knowledge framework of the structure of the comic, but in order to reveal the uses, the similarities, the differences in accessing these stereotypes and scripts, the design of the research set them the challenge of reading partial texts with different styles. That is they had to apply knowledge from assumptions made about the stereotypes and stories of the missing text. This made their use of such frameworks and procedures more overt during the readings.

### **III Visual literacy and visual language**

Before analysing the images in the texts there are certain general rather than specific questions that need to be asked about the use of imagery. For example, how do we use visual language and how does it connect with ways we think and shape our world?

The transfer of words, for example from the direct spoken form to other forms of communication, inevitably includes new structures. Each medium has its own unique systems, therefore the transfer of structures such as elements of grammar, which do not normally occur in the spoken language, has to be addressed. It is assumed that systems such as writing and reading have to be taught through a system of skills transference, which includes letter formation, punctuation, spelling, grammar, word recognition and so on. All of these appear to precede or supersede the ideas that are present in the text. In other words you have to learn the techniques before you can decode and encode or recode.

On the other hand, reading images are perceived to provide none of these problems to the emergently literate child. Wells (1985, quoted in Hall, 1987, p. 36) has said that picture books are less effective as means of literacy building because their use is limited to “labelling interactions” and do not acquaint children with de-

contextualised aspects of texts. On the other hand Zimmer and Zimmer (1978) conclude that “There is considerable scientific research which says the same thing - people must be taught how to read pictures.” (p. 7) They continue by stating that people from different social groups and classes identify with different visual symbols and read them differently. Visuals include special conventions that must be learned and therefore they apply an ideological model to visual literacy. Similar findings regarding the reading of graphical images are reported in Bertin (1984) and in Kolars *et al* (1977).

As images are a collection of individual signifiers which are read collectively their meaning can be used in a more free-floating way, particularly when used in narrative as opposed to an instructional graphic form. This has led to an on-going controversy about whether the reading of images can be described as having a system, a language, in its own right. Barthes highlighted this debate in the opening of ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ in Image, Music, Text (1977, p. 32).

Gombrich has already been mentioned in relation to the schemata model. In discussing art he talks about ‘vocabularies’ of schemata, for example that of architecture. Gombrich’s visual schemata model draws a parallel between art and language. Gombrich acknowledged his debt to the work of linguisticians, such as Jakobson, in developing his belief that reading images is a separate language act. He draws a direct parallel between the language of art and the system of verbal language. “Everything points to the conclusion that the phrase, ‘language of art’ is more than a loose metaphor.” (Gombrich, 1960, p. 76).

Others have felt that Gombrich’s use is too loose. Langer (1986) claims that it is only possible to use the word ‘language’ with reference to art in the metaphorical sense. This is because there is no equivalent in art to linguistic syntactical structures, and because the picture is seen holistically rather than as a set of separate units. In Langer’s opinion, “if one assigned the definition of language to art, it carries rationality into processes that are usually deemed pre-rational.” (ibid., p. 98) Others have chosen to broaden the debate beyond the specificity of syntax and have, like Barthes, dealt with the holistic nature of the image by treating it as just another sign.

“Even when the signifier seems to extend over the whole image, it is nonetheless a sign separated from the others” (1977, p. 6). Barthes’ argument is that we recognise the overall shape or ‘intonation’ which is ‘supra-segmental’. Since they are meaningful in themselves these are signs even if they cannot be easily separated from the whole, as can be achieved in a linguistic analysis. Eco (1976, p. 271) also suggests that images can be called a language when he states, “if there is such *contextual solidarity*, then there must be a *systematic rule*”. Similarly, Kress and van Leeuwen consider that depiction has a grammar where people, places and things are combined into a meaningful whole. “Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual grammar will describe the way in which depicted people, places and things combine in visual statements” (1996, p. 1). If images do have systematic rules then readers must be able to access these rules in just the same way as they do for reading words, that is in a rational way.

The relationship between images and linguistic signifiers can perhaps be seen if we look at some of the orthographies that are more visually orientated. There has been research that has indicated that reading disabilities are rare among children learning a syllabic or logographic language, such as Chinese (Makita, 1968; Yzeng and Hung, 1980; reported in Wrolstad and Fisher, 1985). Chinese developed into an ideographic alphabet sometime before 3,000 bc and today has 50,000 characters. In contrast the Greek alphabet and phonetic system are relatively modern and in comparison to written Chinese more flexible, but because it does not use the ideographic form in its symbolic system, it appears to have more opportunity for reading disabilities to develop. McLuhan (1964) suggests another reason for this phenomenon:

“...pictographic and hieroglyphic writing in Babylonian, Mayan and Chinese cultures represents an extension to human experience. All of these forms give pictorial expression to oral meanings. In contrast, the phonetic alphabet, by a few letters only, was able to encompass all languages. Such an achievement, however, involved the separation of both signs and sounds from their semantic and dramatic meanings.” (p. 87)

These theories suggest that readers more easily construct meaning via visual representation and visual grammar and therefore they can apply rules such as layout, positioning, and framing to a visual or ideographic text. This, it is suggested, is because these types of writing actually more closely reflect the way that our cognitive frameworks access meaning. If they then use these to access metacognitive functions, it would suggest that Gombrich and others' argument that a linguistic model can be applied to visual imagery has substance.

This review has shown that there is implicit if not always explicit a fundamental difference between the two views of visual language. On the one hand there are those who believe that images can be read without training but that reading words require taught skills, and on the other those like Gombrich who believe that visual literacy has also to be 'taught'. But whether taught or caught, one area which has attracted little attention is in how readers read still images and words in combination, even though this has been an accepted form of literacy from the earliest forms of communication (Sabin, 1996). Questions which could be asked are whether the skills and knowledge involved in such a process are significantly different from those of reading the signifying systems separately. If the skill of 'testing its potential' comes more naturally to readers of images, would it be one that could be used to help readers of texts? Are there other complementary aspects between the two systems? What are these connections?

As the comic uses two signifying systems it is also necessary to understand how each works as a language as well as how each is read. The organisation of pictorial systems, which rely on non-linear configuration is different from that of linear written text. We know therefore that reading images and reading text are in some ways different (Goodman, 1985). For example they involve different areas of the brain. Another difference is that words and their linear arrangement are controlled by rules of linguistic grammar and semantics, so that their denotative level, if not the connotative level, follows an agreed set of principles. The reading of the image, on the other hand, may be better defined as "testing it for its potentialities, trying out what fits" (Gombrich, 1960). Kress and van Leeuwen consider that visual

imagery does have a grammar which includes elements such as vectors, and a narrative form that they analyse partly in terms of ‘doing’ and ‘happening’ (1996, p.73) which we could align to Barthes primary codes. Others see the visual form as episodic, concrete, inclusive and oral in mode and the written word working through consistency of syntax, narrative development and abstraction. Barthes’ explanation of relay (1977) is as a process which requires these complementary skills. In applying schemata and knowledge of pictures and words in comics, we are using both the ways that readers use the separate signifying systems and the ways that they combine to create a unity that must involve a synthesis of the two. Text and pictures must limit the meaning of each other as well as providing a higher level of narrative completeness. The literature shows that in using a form based upon narrative and sequence the decoding and construction required goes beyond the instructional or illustrative function of image. It includes narrative theory. The recent reports (1999) that all levels of students find watching television versions of Charles Dickens’ texts helpful in comprehension and all the other aspects normally associated with literary criticism has resonance with the positive reports of students reading Shakespeare, classics and other literary forms in graphic novel form.<sup>1</sup> The same principle seems to apply, that is, reading images helps rather than hinders reading words.

The question that underlies this discussion is, what is the difference between visual and verbal systems? Goodman’s (1985) discussion of depiction and description is a useful way of analysing the different uses of the signifying systems. It is reasonable to expect that as the symbol systems, vary the way one reads them for meaning and the type of meaning must also vary. For example, in picture, each part, colour, line, angle counts. Goodman refers to this as ‘repleteness’. In the written word the suggested meaning is through limited features, for example the shape of the word and its syntactical position in the sentence. These employ different mental skills (ibid. p. 36). Goodman suggests that the difference between word and image can be defined by how the sign links to its referent.

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<sup>1</sup> Selwood and Irving (1993)

Depiction is the representation that has an immediate sign-to-referent link.

Description stands for an abstract idea and therefore does not resemble its referent.

Signs are therefore ranked along a continuum from iconicity to abstractness. This concept has been used in analysing signs in the continuum model discussed in Chapter 8. Goodman argues that a depiction may only take some of the qualities rather than totally imitate the object. It can also have many ways to resemble it and no object can be depicted as seen by the innocent eye because there is no innocent eye. What distinguish depiction from description are the characteristics of notationality and its correlates. A non-notational system is replete in that it may use dimensions such as line, colour and space. There are degrees of repleteness in this system, so for example a sketch is less replete than a picture.

No symbol by itself is a depiction or description; its state (or quality) is determined by the system to which it belongs. (Salomon 1981, p. 40) Descriptions which are mostly verbal differ from depictions not by virtue of being arbitrary but by belonging to particular symbol schemes. Goodman's theory also suggests that resemblance to a referent will not necessarily allow it to be used as depiction, but in practice similarity to depicted objects is usually sought by readers using schemata (Gombrich, 1960). This is not so with a notational system. A word such as 'cat' printed in a particular colour would not necessarily change the meaning of the word to indicate a cat of a certain colour. "Arbitrariness or abstractness are neither necessary nor sufficient condition for description." (Goodman, 1985) How does this help to explain how a comic text is read? The comic has a specific set of conventions which I suggest can move between depiction and description. If we look at the continuum model suggested as one way of analysing the use of signifiers in a comic text we can see how this could apply in practice.<sup>2</sup>

Images in the comic form are linked to particular signifiers, such as speed lines and speech bubbles. Here we can apply the concept of ideography, that is the combination of an icon and a determinative sign so that meaning arises from the two signifying systems. The combination of images, or juxtaposition, into a syntagmatic

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 8: three proposed models



arrangement for narrative purposes also uses the ideographic principle. Eisenstein (1929) noted how abstract, intellectual ideas which could not be conveyed in discrete Japanese caricatures could be created by association of caricatures, in other words by montage. As an ideographic language Japanese has similarities to Chinese in the way in which it constructs meaning.

There has been some work done into how the structure of meaning is created through a syntagmatic arrangement of images. In one study the representational pictures corresponded to phrases or clauses in the written form. (Marcel T., and Barnard, P., 1977) Individually the images had fairly unambiguous semantics (conceptual references) but the sequential relationships provided a problem of inference. The experiment tried to show whether the comic strip could be used as a substitute for instructions from a written text. They discovered that in trying to make the images monosemic (Bertin, 1983) and unambiguous they came across cultural factors that meant that the images could be interpreted variously. As they stated:

“even individual pictures are not necessarily understood ‘directly’. Conventions underlie the reading not only of deliberately symbolic art (e.g. Egyptian wall paintings or Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’), as delineated by art historians (Gombrich, 1950, 1972; Goodman, 1968), but also of simple line drawings or any representational depiction (Arnheim, 1974, Deregowski, 1977). However, sequences of pictures present the additional problems of the logical and semantic links between pictures.”  
(in Kolars *et al*, Processing Visible Language, 1979, pp. 501-518)

We know that even individual pictures are not necessarily understood ‘directly’. Conventions underlie the reading not only of deliberately symbolic art but also of simple line drawings, (Gombrich, 1960). However, the research cited above shows that sequences of pictures present additional problems of the logical and semantic links between pictures that involve a syntagm through juxtaposition of static or non-continuous images.

Goodman (1985, p. 391) states that “Those functions of literacy that are most universal and needed for surviving, like dealing with logos, signs, labels, forms, directories, etc., are the ones to which children will respond most universally. Responses to book-based literacy are much less universal.” So graphical cues may be important in the social context of reading. In addition typographical cues which are listed by Goodman and which are more dominant in these graphic forms are also important. This may therefore help to explain the motivation to use this form by individual readers as a vehicle for building literacy.

Twyman (1987) produced a matrix to describe the relationship between the user and the different types of reading that required graphical understanding. In this matrix the comic is described as “the pictorial and verbal linear interrupted form”. For his axes Twyman used the method of configuration (linear interrupted) from pure linear to non-linear and the mode of symbolisation (pictorial and verbal numerical) from verbal numerical to schematic. He noted the changes that had occurred and noted that they involved a shift back again in reading from linear to non-linear configuration. In researching graphical language when discussing cell 9 of his matrix (the comic form) which made use of “the combined ‘pictorial and verbal/-numerical’ mode of symbolization along with the ‘linear interrupted’ method of configuration” (p.145), he posited the question “How do readers/viewers develop an appropriate strategy for extracting information ... what problems are presented by the apparent conflict between the linearity of the verbal mode and the non-linearity of the pictorial mode?” (p. 148) He suggested that this question was particularly important because these two modes in combination at all levels were being used “more regularly now... than at any other time since the Middle Ages.” ( p. 148)

In his review of the literature Twyman commented that although the comic has generated considerable literature, it did not appear to have attracted empirical research workers. He does quote one experiment (Holmes 1963, also reported in Kolers et al., 1979) which found that a series of pictures presented in a linear configuration was more effective in passing on information than only two pictures. Although such experiments were aimed at using the image and text form to pass on specific information or instructions rather than as narratives, they do indicate some

of the decisions incumbent on a reader when reading a sequence of images. One of these is the reading path. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) discuss this briefly in relation to linear and non-linear compositions, when they state that “Other kinds of pages (e.g. traditional comic strips) and images (e.g. time-line diagrams) are also designed to be read in this linear way” (pp. 218-223).

### **Cohesion and coherence**

In language development the functionalist model inspired the systemicist tradition exemplified by Halliday (1978) and related the use of language to the social semiotic. Halliday had suggested that “a major function of the textual component is to assign prominence to elements in the discourse by assigning them to the boundaries . . . boundaries are often signalled explicitly by cohesive ties in visually informative prose. Graphic cues take over the function normally realised by cohesive ties in speech” (reported by Bernhardt in Benson *et al*, p. 22). Halliday was here referring to elements such as layout, paragraphing and other visual references. The idea of cohesion can also be applied to the layout in a comic text. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, pp.3-7) include a broad definition of cohesion as one of their seven standards of textuality with coherence. According to their definition cohesion:

“...concerns the ways in which the components of the SURFACE TEXT, i.e. the actual words we hear or see, are *mutually connected within a sequence*.” The second standard, coherence, “concerns the ways in which the components of the TEXTUAL WORLD, i.e. the configuration of CONCEPTS and RELATIONS which *underlie* the surface text, are *mutually accessible and relevant*. . . Coherence is clearly not a mere feature of texts, but rather the outcome of cognitive processes among text users.” (ibid. p.13-15)

They identified the distinction between the two levels and stated that, “connectivity of the surface and connectivity of underlying content is indispensable” (ibid. p.13-5).

Both visual and non-visual texts achieve rhetorical structure but the means by which each signifying system achieves this may be different. If the readers are working with high level structures which originate material they are then in control of causal links. It is then that the surface cohesive markers are used appropriately. The interactions of social, contextual and cognitive factors create coherence. The coherence and cohesion of the text are significant for literacy.<sup>3</sup>

The above discussion shows how the three models which are proposed in this study, the continuum model, the framework model and the core and spiral periphery model, can be aligned to different theoretical positions. The syntactical explanation is the basis of the continuum model proposed as one way of analysing the reading. In this the position of the sign, arbitrary iconic or linguistic, depends upon the use. The semantic system provides potential and predictive meanings because it works on networks (nodes) which interact both textually and culturally. In other words a semantic, paradigmatic link has more power to generate meaning than a syntactical or grammatical link. The semantic concept is the basis for the framework model. A systemic model can be inclusive of the context of the specific reading but also generically applied to similar communication events. The inclusiveness allows for a model that aligns to the core and spiral periphery model suggested in this research. It shows how texts work as a whole, not at the single word or sentence level as in a syntactical model, and interact with the reader through coherence, cohesion and textual knowledge.

#### **IV Text and Readers**

It has already been stated that in analysing the comic texts in this study the Saussure/Barthes tradition has been adopted. The structuralist or linguistic model which Barthes used in his discussion of the rhetoric of the image in Image, Music, Text (1977, p. 32) introduced the concept of relay and used a semiotic approach to textual deconstruction. This looks at texts as structurally similar to a linguistic

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<sup>3</sup> Coherence and cohesion are discussed in relation to the research findings.

model suggested by Ferdinand de Saussure (1959). Any signifying system can therefore be understood by analysing the codes or signs that mirror the linguistic codes. The text therefore becomes the means through which these codes are articulated. This allows a semiotic analysis to be made of secondary systems (Barthes sees language as the primary semiological system) which would include pictures and comic codes. Thus we can apply a well-developed and sophisticated analytical semiotic framework to consider the structures of the comic that may itself have no available metalanguage (Fowler, 1981 p. 182). The codes “are simply associative fields, a supratextual organisation of notations which impose a certain notation of structure” (Barthes, 1988, p. 288). This view of texts emphasises the social act of reading. It is necessary to identify the difference between understanding texts as standing for an independent set of meanings and texts as a range of possible meanings, that is the difference between a structuralist and culturalist approach. For example Todorov suggests that there is a ‘grammar’ of narrative and he believed that this grammar underlies all human experience and therefore informs all signifying systems. This is in contrast to the idea of Whorf and Sapir which suggested that language itself altered the human cultural experience. Todorov included language as the primary signifying system but also art as another signifying system which contains “the imprint of the abstract forms of language” (in Hawkes, 1977, p. 96). Todorov’s ideas about reading are affirmed by Barthes who related the reader’s world to a semiotic and structuralist analysis. In this the text is part of a one-to-one correspondence in which sense is created through a series of codes. This idea that we encode/decode our experiences is similar to Lévi-Strauss’ binary opposition as well as Todorov’s narrative ‘grammar’.<sup>4</sup> In this model a written work is created (constructed) from formal elements and has no value, such as of high or low culture, outside this form. That is the text and analysis of that text is self-sufficient and without relative value. This is similar to Saussure’s analysis of language as a self-contained, autonomous structure. (The potential to use parole was taken up by later studies.) In narrative theory we can see the formalist approach not only in the work of Todorov, but also in the work of Propp (1968) whose analysis of narrative applied to folk stories suggested a linear, syntagmatic organisation and Genette

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion see Hawkes (1977) Structuralism and Semiotics.

(1980) who considered that narratives had a limited number of functions hidden by numerous surface differences.

There have been challenges to these views, one example being the culturalist approach. Ong (1982, p. 166) criticises the assumption that “the naïve reader presumes the prior presence of an extramental referent which the word presumably captures and passes on through a kind of pipeline to the psyche.” He suggests that this analysis ignores the residual oral mindset which works on ‘informational cores’ in which there is not the same organisation as in a literate organisation but more subtle, less deterministic connections.

Barthes (1953; 1964) had also acknowledged the problem of a linear model of language; “*En somme, la Langue est à la fois le produit et l’instrument de la parole: il s’agit donc bien d’une véritable dialectique*” (1953, p. 88). But Barthes considered that the dichotomy of structure/usage could be substituted by langue/parole as used by Saussure, “both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions...” (1977, p. 9) and he developed and applied Saussure’s semiotic analysis beyond the text to the context. Any text must be set in the reader’s context. Barthes’ analysis of texts therefore used five codes which allowed that the text had no meaning unless someone actually read and responded to it. In Barthes’ formulation the response was predicated on the codes and therefore determined. But he also suggested that the sense of creation of ‘reality’ is “genuinely ours to make and to remake as we please. The pleasure of that making is creative in nature, and perhaps *jouissance* is a good term for it.” (Hawkes, 1977, p. 121) This aspect of Barthes’ theories seems to accord with the less deterministic models of the way readers respond to texts. It does indicate the possibility of a post-structuralist approach.

### **From text to reader**

The emphasis on the text and the type of linguistic or semiotic analysis which counts and deals with numerical data can obscure the ways in which the subject positions of the reader are constructed. Reader response theories (Iser, 1974; Holland, 1968;

Rosenblatt, 1978) acknowledge that skills are by themselves rather barren attributes. It is the intellectual use to which these skills are put which are significant for the reader, and it is the conceptual schemata provided by knowledge which are the means of thinking. Iser (1974) replaced the objective model suggested by a semiotic analysis with a communication model which involved a transformation of meaning. This ensured that a transaction between reader and text was taken into account and this constitutes one dimension of reader response theory. The movement was towards a model based upon discourse, with text seen as the medium for communication in a literate society. This was in contrast to the text anchored into a single response as de-coded by a specific reader. This re-focused attention onto the reader and the subjectivity of any reading. As Rosenblatt (1985) suggested in relation to literary criticism, it was possible to affirm the reader's contribution and the literary experience as an act set within a social origin and therefore with effects. In this transaction there would be different kinds of reading as "Any literary transaction will fall somewhere in the continuum between the aesthetic and efferent poles." (ibid. p. 38) The work of Kress and van Leeuwen has a similar shift from the static sign to the process of sign-making, "arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker . . ." (1996 p. 6). They indicate the importance of what they term affective factors. They see the affective and cognitive as not being antithetical.

## **Discussion**

There is a danger, as Wrolstad and Fisher state, that "The study of literacy is all too often a matter of spinning words about words, without looking back to the images that precede words and the feelings that precede both" (1985, p. 307). This research attempts to avoid this as a contribution to understanding a reading event, but it is also itself an act, a social practice, and involves a personal response to a particular set of experiences, which include the teaching of reading to a wide range of underachievers within the educational definition of literacy. This is comparable to what Halliday refers to as the context of situation set within a context of culture, which is part of a social semiotic. In this sense I am using the wider definition of language as one of many symbol systems which uses signs to convey meaning. But

more specifically it also includes the idea that meaning is integrally linked to linguistic choices and order, the paradigm and syntagm of choice, which is contextually located. (Halliday, 1978)

This explains why the question of how readers read comics is set within the debate on literacy with its social, educational and personal implications. In general, the way that literacy has been historically defined means that although the comic has been studied through many disciplines, such as history (O'Sullivan, 1990), sociology (Barker, 1989), art (Sabin, 1996) and cultural studies (Twitchin, 1988) it has always been fighting a rearguard action against socially constructed definitions of literacy and literature. The consequence of this appears to be that the actual processes of construction and reading, as opposed to the construction and consumption of the form, has had limited attention from researchers. Part of the purpose of this review therefore is to identify some of the limitations and absences, but also to use the strengths of each position in an integrative approach to the research question.

One principle that is central to this approach is change. Because representation is dependent upon the specific cultural, historical as well as personal modes employed, the semiotics of visual representation and literacy are not static and have involved fundamental changes. This explains differences between visual styles of representation, for example from symbolic representations to realist forms, and different fashions in comic design, as well as developments in spoken and written forms.

These changes are related to values rooted in society. The democratisation of the Greek city states was contemporaneous with the development of the Greek alphabet which allowed the first generally literate societies, as opposed to literate élites, to develop. The irony maybe that this apparently democratic system has helped to develop a hierarchy of literacies which we have inherited for our personal and social use. However, this is not a static development. The semiotic of culture may indicate a dependence upon values. Are certain literacies forced upon us whilst others are used purely for pleasure and are ignored for other purposes? The



ideological and economic models of literacy would consider these as essential questions to ask against the charge of representation.

This means that the symbol systems are not neutral in their reception. Many writers, including Kress, Halliday and Bakhtin, have contributed to this understanding of language. Goodman (Gollasch, Language and Literacy, The Selected Writings of Kenneth S. Goodman, 1983) also suggests that full participation in society, which a wider view of literacy should involve, has to be concomitant with economic, political, social and cultural changes. If we assume that the educator's role is to propose problems about codified existential situations in order to help learners arrive at a more critical view of their own reality, or at in Freire's term 'conscientization', then their task is to create a capacity for expression which is a two-way process. Freire's awareness of the relationship between literacy and control meant that he built literacy into his education programmes as functional, necessary and revolutionary. The reading of comics provides a site which has been overtly used for 'conscientization'. It has proved a site of ideological debate since Topffer realised the great potential "...in so powerful a weapon". (Gombrich, 1960, p. 286)

In addition therefore, linked to skills of decoding and the creation of meaning, is the social question of what reading literacy is. This is because to assess any act of reading it must be measured against a set of criteria which define success or failure in terms of reading outcomes. These might include comprehension, empathy, experience, such as Rosenblatt's (1984) aesthetic and efferent categories, and knowledge. This we call being literate, and our relative literacy will be judged against the chosen criteria.

In research into reading texts, theories such as Ong's informational cores, Pearson's knowledges, Minsky's frameworks, Gombrich's schemata and Chomsky's deep structures all provide models to understand the process as part of a complex synthesis. Reading cannot be understood in discrete areas (Cherry, 'Skills and Competencies in various forms of Literacy' in Communication Studies, an Introductory Reader, 1985). The competent reader will use many skills and areas

of understanding, including the knowledge of the text (declarative) the knowledge of how to read the text (procedural) and the knowledge of when and how to use certain strategies (conditional). The less competent reader will not access some or all of these (Clarke, The Reluctant Reader, 1969). At the same time we have to also allow that there is a relationship, a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1985) between the text and the imagination of the reader.

This review has taken four traditional approaches to reading; models of literacy, reading styles, the specific form of text and the social context. The first and the last of these could be considered as the over-arching paradigms within which the middle two are situated and are therefore placed at the two ends of this review to symbolise this function. Figure 1.1 illustrates this structure. In this the reader and the text are constructed as a result of the community of meaning makers within which they are situated. In certain early models this could be seen as deterministic, but others have seen it is as a struggle between the different powers of the socially determined and the socially constructed (Freire, 1970). In the context of this research the power struggle that underpins its being is that of the social construction of the meaning of the words literacy and literate. These issues are addressed through their ideological function. One of the ways that this can be seen in operation is the way that readers in education are often placed in the position of being powerless. The meanings that they take or make of texts are judged against an absolute of being right or wrong. A classic example of this is the comprehension exercise. Additionally the types of texts which are used in the classroom constitute a judgmental hierarchy; this is good literature, that is bad. In most institutions the teaching of reading is focused upon a narrow definition of what constitutes reading and would not for example involve images, in spite of the fact that to be visually literate might be seen as essential for an 'educated' individual in today's cultures.

Within this constructionist paradigm sits the interaction of the reader with the text. This interactive paradigm involves the two central parts of the review, that of reading styles and the style of text. Readers are individuals who identify and interact in different ways with texts. The cognitive demands and psychological conditions associated with each reading would indicate different reader responses

for each reading act. Reader identity is partly constructed from this personal activity, but as it is set within the constructionist paradigm, is also partly constructed by social factors. The various reactions of students and teachers when asked to work with a comic or graphic novel constitute examples of how personal identity as a reader can be challenged within a particular social context. This is discussed in more detail in the chapters on the earlier research projects (Chapter 2, Appendices 3-5).

This concept of two-way interaction suggests a multiplicity of choices, or readings on the part of the decoder, and on the obverse side the multiplicity of choices that the 'sign-maker' uses to construct the text. Both these choices are constrained by the social, cultural and historical paradigms in which they are set. As such they are inevitably socially available choices and are dependent upon and constrained, if not absolutely, by codes and conventions; the agreed sets of rules and structures.

The act of reading depends upon these agreed codes even if individually interpreted and it is this individual interpretation which constitutes the many complex activities ranging from physical to cognitive procedures in reading. In reviewing the types of work done on reading strategies, skills and styles the emphasis has been upon decoding, comprehending and responding to various types of written texts. It has been discipline-dependent, including education and cognitive psychology as well as cultural and literary studies. More recently there has been a widening of the definition of reading to refer to the creation of meaning using visual texts. These studies have come out of the work of linguists such as Saussure and Jakobson and therefore use a semiotic analytical framework. Seminal to these theories is the work of Metz (1974) with relation to film and of Barthes in his discussion of still images (1973, 1977).

If the text combines several different signifying systems, such as words, symbols and images, the skills and knowledges involved in decoding are inevitably intertwined. They make connections. The theories of understanding texts, such as Gombrich's proposal of a language of art, and those of linguists such as Saussure, initiated a debate which has considered whether the processes of reading pictures and of

reading words may be complementary if not symbiotic. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue that there is also no definitive or arbitrary sign/signifier/signified relation, only “a process of sign making in which the stratum of the signifier and the stratum of the signified are relatively independent of each other” (p. 7). These discussions about what constitutes a language, the various reading processes and their differentiation in outcomes and the textual construction constitute the basis for this review.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the aim has been to review critically some of the literature around the concepts of literacy, readers and texts. It has indicated where there are connections as well as conflicts between the different theoretical perspectives of literacy. By privileging particular views in the sources it indicates some of the tensions which will be reflected in the study. The literature on reading has contributed to a taxonomy of reading categories. Additionally this review has looked at ways of analysing texts using semiotic and structuralist approaches. This has contributed to an analysis of the text which also attempts to set the readings within the social semiotic. In this process the affective response of the reader is seen to be one of the aspects to which this research can direct itself. All the areas which have been discussed in this review are relevant in studying how people read comics. They suggest that readers produce and communicate a social construction in which sign systems are codified for particular purposes in particular settings. The next chapter looks at how the presentational features of the comic contribute to an understanding of reading images and words.

## Chapter 4

### The Presentational Features of the Comic

#### Introduction

“There are wide claims for the importance of Bande Dessinée in France at the moment ... not just entertainment for children ... There’s something serious going on ...” (Christopher Page in conversation at the French Institute in London, 24.4.89, BBC Radio 4).

The comic is not a purely Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. Countries such as France, Belgium, Italy and Spain, and in the East, Japan and China, use the graphic form in education and entertainment. (Silberman and Dyroff, Comics and Visual Culture, 1986; Mohr, Kids and Comics in Different Cultures, 1987) As can be deduced from the above quotation, popularity and use in these countries have not necessarily been synonymous with official approval. Even in Japan, where the manga comic magazines account for over a quarter of the published books and magazines, the question of the effect on literacy is being raised.<sup>1</sup>

In the West, since the end of the Second World War, there has been a constant if small stream of academic studies of comics, most of which has circulated around history, style and content and upon literacy and effects. A further interest in the form emerged through the study of language and the application of theories such as semiotics, with an ideological underpinning. But as Kress and van Leeuwen state:

“Societies tend to develop ways for talking about codes only with respect to codes that are highly valued, that play a significant role in controlling the common understandings any society needs in order to function. Until now,

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<sup>1</sup> Greenlees, Times Educational Supplement 10.1.97

language, especially written language, was the most highly valued, the most frequently analysed, the most prescriptively taught and the most meticulously policed code in our society.” (1996, p. 32)

This view illustrates why the language of comics has possibly not been a feature of much of the literature around comics. It also suggests that it may be useful to explore through this form visual and verbal codes for evidence of different uses of language skills.

The fact that there has been little formal work with the comic within a pedagogical context is partly because the study of the relationship of comics to children’s reading has usually gone down the literacy, content and morality route. This is in spite of anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of the comic as a means for developing reading skills and for broader educational purposes. Selwood and Irving’s survey on the use of comics with young people threw up a response from one teacher that is representative of many other early reading experiences:

“As a child I was a late reader bored to death with ‘Janet and John’. Learnt to read in a fortnight whilst ill - given a whole stack of ‘Eagle’ comics by a friend.” (1993, p. 116).

These types of stories may be apocryphal, but they are indicative of the fact that there are many routes into literacy. The building of bridges between such different routes may provide evidence of reading and habits of literacy which it would be useful to explore for evidence of how reading skills develop in an individual reading profile.

One example of the educational use of comics is the reworking of classic texts into graphic form as with the Oval project on Shakespeare. Another example is in dealing with social issues, such as the comic ‘The Death Penalty’ ( *Crisis* comics and Amnesty International). Communication and Media Studies have used comics as popular cultural texts. Super-heroes Batman and Superman have illustrated debates about representation and stereotypes, myths and ideologies, culture and institutions,

style and form, historicism and intertextuality as well as the media effects debate. These have usually been based upon assumptions about the intellectual value of such texts. They have been distanced from the reader and the reading process.

As already noted significant work on comics has included looking at the social and political context of the comic, such as that by Orwell (1946) and Selwood and Irving (1993) while others have looked at the historical and cultural significance of the comic, for example O'Sullivan, (1990). There has also been some interest in the semiotics of the comic language as with Eco's analyses, Apocalypse Postponed (1965, translated 1994) and The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts (1979), Barthes' analysis, (1977) and Fresnault-Deruelle (1975) on comic strips, as well as categories of codes (Roux, 1970; O'Sullivan, 1990). These have concentrated upon either the construction of the text or the reader as consumer. They do not necessarily tell us how readers read comics.

The capacity to comprehend the integration of the visual and verbal, the structuring of space on a page, the meaning of montage, the referencing of planes within a frame, the use of symbolic codes and connotation, the synthesis of these and other elements to construct a narrative add up to a complex process. This 'richness' (Metz, 1974) which results from the involvement of the visual and the verbal cannot be studied in a purely reductionist form. Each language feeds off the other; they are not discrete but overlap, predict, reflect and connect. As Metz states with reference to film language:

"Although the interaction of their codes has not been studied in all its detail ... it remains certain that one function (among others) of spoken language is to name the units articulated by sight (but also to help it to articulate them) and that one function (among others) of sight is to influence the semantic configurations of language (but also to be influenced by it.)" (1974, p.35)

Obviously reading has both processes and outcomes. There is the process of decoding the signs, whether visual or verbal, so that a reference to a tree signifies a tree whether it is an iconic or symbolic sign for a tree. This is its textual function.

Secondly there has to be an interpretation of the tree within the author's use of that sign. The interpretation of the author's meaning may also involve a metaphoric or metonymic meaning, such as 'the tree of life'. This will be combined with the knowledge and experience of the reader who will be able to re-construct the author's meaning filtered through their own knowledge and experience of language (Halliday's ideational function.) Lastly the effect of this reading in terms of action, information, experience or a re-defining of attitudes will show that the reader has assimilated the ideas and applied them beyond the original reading act (the interpersonal function of Halliday's social semiotic.) This is an oversimplified explanation, but it does allow for the different approaches of reading research theories such as those of Goodman (1985), Richards (1924), Iser (1978) and Rosenblatt (1985) as well as a social semiotic perspective as taken by Halliday particularly with verbal language and Kress and van Leeuwen with visual language. Kress and van Leeuwen are interested in the coding of visual images and their purpose is to develop a language to talk about this coding. As they say, "Given the importance of visually displayed information in so many significant social contexts, there is an urgent need for developing adequate ways of talking and thinking about the visual." (1996, p.33) Their work reveals the complexity of codes in a visual design. By extension, this suggests that the understanding of the total message in a comic which contains image, word and narrative over an extended text is an act of considerable sophistication.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the particular language of the comic, the codes, conventions and metafictional devices which are involved in the different signifying systems. It uses categories to look at areas such as the iconography and typography of the comic. Its aim is to try to identify grammatical elements of this particular form so that in analysing the readers' responses they can be placed against an agreed set of rules and conventions to reveal processes. It is not therefore a survey or history of comic and graphic book design and art. These can be found in works such as Eisner (1989) and Sabin (1996), or a detailed semiotic analysis of texts as found in Barthes (1973) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996).



## **The Language of the Comic**

In a comic there are three basic systems in operation: the iconic, the linguistic and the comic's narrative conventions. To understand a narrative does not only require the ability to decode the different signifying systems, but also the ability to interpret and understand the form and thus to re-create the story.

There have been many theories that aim to reveal the structure of stories and how they work at different levels. For example, in *S/Z* (1975) Barthes developed a model of five narrative codes, two primary and three secondary. The essential primary codes (hermeneutic and proairetic) provide the core manipulation of time and space, thus creating cause and effect. Often in the graphic novel a hermeneutic function will be found in the frame at the bottom right of the page. The secondary codes, the cultural, symbolic and semic codes, involve the use of layout, of schematic presentation, such as speech bubbles and lines in a comic, and of juxtaposition and framing. Readers must be aware of the narrative function of each of the elements. Where this understanding is significantly absent it appears that readers are unable to understand texts. Some of the participants in this study could not develop an understanding of the narrative as they focused on the single frame as a separate unit rather than looking for patterns and connections. They were unable to establish textual coherence through the 'inter-sentential' ties, or 'relay' between the systems of text, image and comic conventions at the level of the diegesis and thus failed, in the research terms, to reach the critical point.

Kress and Halliday list some of the correspondences they found between visual and linguistic narrative processes (1996, p. 77). They illustrate this with the analyses of children's work where they are seen to narrativize the conceptual, that is they add the words and images to take up narrative parts of the story being told, for example setting and perspective. They claim that the pictures drawn in this work are therefore not merely illustrations of the text but have narrative functions. Their conclusion is that:

“...children actively experiment with the representational resources of word and image, and with the ways that they can be combined. Their drawings are not just illustrations of a verbal text, not just ‘creative embellishment’, they are part of a ‘multimodally’ conceived text, a semiotic interplay in which each mode, the verbal and the visual, is given a defined and equal role to play.” (1996, p. 118).

Although this relates to children’s work I would suggest that it is a possible explanation of how words and images are used in comics.

In the comic book, where images and words are linked into a narrative structure, the decoding is more complex than if each element is analysed separately. Even if we were to reduce the verbal and visual systems to effectively separate semiotic analyses the result would fail to explain their interaction and use by readers. For the purposes of this analysis each signifying system is looked at discretely, but to understand the message and the reader’s response and style it must be the holistic reading that is significant.

In visual language researchers have identified different aspects of meaning which are often dependent upon the form. Mangan (‘Cultural Conventions of Pictorial Representation’, 1978) mentions cultural specific values such as colour and depth cues. Metz (1974, p.32) lists the various codes that may come into play in reading a photograph such as perceptual systems, codes of identification, codes of iconographic systems, connotations, systems of taste and the aesthetics of photography. All are open to cultural variables.<sup>2</sup> In a similar exercise Eco (1968) drew up a preliminary list of codes within the still image in which he identified ten main categories that could be used. Kress and van Leeuwen consider a grammar of visual design which is based upon vectors and which have meanings such as structures of reality, positioning and representation. Reading images which are laid

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<sup>2</sup> Barthes in The Responsibility of Form regarded photographs as unable to provide movement or repetition in Nodelmann (1988)

out in sequence must involve many of these and additionally those of sequence or montage and ellipsis. It is therefore not a simple act of recognition and deconstruction of discrete frames and codes, but a complex synthesis that has parallels in the linguistic codes.

Even though these analyses help to identify certain elements, the comic form cannot be identified with the photograph, or with the framed photographs of the photo-story. The latter which uses discrete images lacks the cohesion and dynamism of the graphic story, even if it uses some of the conventions of the form, such as speech bubbles and inter-titles. Nor can picture books, where the images are illustrations to the story rather than integral to the narrative, be compared to the comic form. There are obvious transition texts between the illustrated picture book and the comic story. Examples can be seen in the stories about Rupert Bear, where the images are fairly static and the words under each frame are expressly literary units being written in rhyme. At the other end of the spectrum are texts like *The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs. In this the images are totally dominant in the narrative and even speech has to be provided by the reader; as one LSS student showed in some of the preliminary work done with this text:

Tracy:

a boy and a snowman...

the boy is on his skate board and the snowman is putting his hand out and behind them there is a room with balloons on the wall and also the snowman is very hot...

They are thinking *great this is a lot of fun why don't I have a go to try this out* and they are very happy also the boy is putting his hands out and they are both looking at each other

(The words in italics are Tracy's reconstruction of thoughts and speech that are **not** present in the book.)

There are also crossovers of codes such as speech bubbles or balloons. Such 'visual quoting devices' can be seen used in other graphic forms. This illustrates the fluidity of the different modes of communication.

The comic is made up of a series of 'plans' which obey a syntax corresponding to the sequence of a film or a chapter in a book. Narrative is created through syntagmatic arrangements. Obviously, as for any narrative and its coherence, the comic story will

subsequently be re-constructed by the reader into the original order, the plot<sup>3</sup>. The comic reader is not constrained by the temporality of the moving image nor by the linearity of the text. The reading is more within the control of the reader who may read *mosaically*, that is out of the original order intended by the author and not in the linearity or direction of the design. By contrast, even though in a literary text, a film, or television or radio broadcast the narrative may be out of the logical or chronological order of events, the reader of these texts is more constrained by the medium and codes through which the information is conveyed. The process of reading a graphic novel may have different potentials from reading these other types of text. This may account in part for the way they are used by readers.

The particular characteristics of the comic that have been identified for analysis include frames, layout, typography, sound, speech bubbles, action lines, point of view. Figure 7.4 shows the number of references made to each of these areas in the taped discussions and thus the relative weight given to each for the purpose of narrative re-telling. These categories show that this is not a detailed semiotic analysis of individual frames, but an analysis of the process of narrative through framing.

## **The Features of the Comic**

As there is a close association between the way images in film and in comics create meaning, the vocabulary involved has been adapted from that used for film.<sup>4</sup>

### **The *Mise en Page* or Layout**

In the western world we have generally been conditioned to read from left to right and top to bottom. The layout of frames will often follow this reading convention,

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<sup>3</sup> The plot is the actual order of events. The narrative is the way that the story is told.

<sup>4</sup> 'The *bande dessinée*, literature and cinema are perhaps only the three branches off the same trunk' (Beylie, 1971, p.35)

but unlike language it is not obligatory. The reader's strategies are in part controlled by the size and position of the frames and thus the design of the page. A large dominant frame at the top of the page would attract the reader and might have the narrative function of setting the scene or introducing characters. Alternatively a dominant frame may be placed in the centre of the page with others spinning around the circumference. Or it may be placed along the extreme right of the page, so that it is immediately seen as the page is turned. The other frames on the left of the page may provide background information or back story to the dominant frame. These are just some examples of the possible alternatives to the formal layout of horizontal left to right sequence. In addition our reading does not have to follow the intended design within the page (Buswell, in Nodelmann, 1988). The 'global' scan provides information to a reader on a range of possible strategies for reading a page. This may lead individual readers to alter the dominant mode and concentrate upon other, perhaps more personally significant, frames. In the event only one of the readings in this research overtly showed this latter global scan style, which perhaps shows the dominance of the linguistic convention.

## Frames

The frame is the main structuring device of the comic form, and its importance in analysis is therefore self-evident. The research showed over three times more reference to frames than to other categories. The reader is able to look into a frame, look outside a frame, and look from within a frame. Wherever we are positioned we are obliged to use the frame as a reference point. A frame is two-dimensional and is in its basic form a square, usually arranged in lines of two or four frames to a row, and four rows to a page. From this standard, which seems to have been established in the comic's earliest forms<sup>5</sup>, any variation of design and positioning creates meaning.

Frames can be categorised into three main groups. The *scene setting frame* has, as the name implies, the function of establishing the setting and a general overview.

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<sup>5</sup> Rudolphe Topffer used this device at the beginning of the nineteenth century

For example the opening frame of *The Famous Five and the Golden Galleon*, establishes time and place. In one large establishing frame we see both the time, early morning signified by images and words through the shadows, bins, empty streets and a café opening up with the onomatopoeic words adding sound effects, and the location of a street outside a prison, signified by the wall and the words H.M. Prison. These narrative proposals are confirmed by the next frame which establishes the inside of the prison through the convention of bars, and the three men who are about to be released into the early morning empty streets. This function of scene setting can appear throughout the story. Such a frame may also serve to summarise events that have preceded the scene setting frame. The written text may then be a dominant part of the narrative constructed within the frame as in *Asterix and the Normans*, “Another peaceful day has dawned in the little village we know so well...” This establishes time, place, situation.

The second group is the *middle distance frame*. In this type of frame important information concerning the character(s) can be conveyed, such as physical, psychological and metaphorical relationships. The *mise en frame* (composition and content) form an essential part of the information provided for the reader to understand the narrative. In the second frame of *The Famous Five and the Golden Galleon* information about the three men is provided by seeing them through the bars of a prison cell. The desk, the cases, the storage racks, the uniformed officer, the barred windows, the verbal and non-verbal communication all contribute to character, setting, narrative enigma and role (Barthes’ primary and secondary codes.)

Finally there is the *close-up frame*. This, as its name suggests, focuses upon important aspects of the story in either word or image. Its message is differentiated by content, focus and angle. In this kind of frame the reader is placed in close proximity, either to the object to ensure that they have considered its significance, or to a character to reveal psychological tension and motivation. In *Judge Dredd* we have two examples, the cockroach in frame 2 and Judge Dredd’s fingers in frame 8.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix 2.4

Among these three types there are obviously variations that can be placed on a continuum nearer to one or the other of the main frames. It is also possible to involve the information from two types of frame within one boundary. Amongst other functions it can create depth of field and the equivalent to parallel editing. With depth of field its use is often for the foreground and background to comment on each other in some way. In *Tintin in America*, Tintin is seen in the foreground walking past a background of technical and advertising detritus. This provides a silent comment on the pollution of the environment and the distance between the haves and the have-nots in America during the Depression.

Another example is found in *Canardo*.<sup>7</sup> Here Ferdinand approaches a building and we are positioned from his viewpoint. In the foreground is a broken, leafless tree. Its black, contorted branches frame the building with grasping fingers, metaphorically signifying that the building in the background holds some sort of evil. Ferdinand's thoughts are in a speech bubble that continues into the next frame. From this frame we have a reverse view from the house looking at Ferdinand hidden in the trees. This device provides us with information through depth of field, and gives us multiple perspectives upon this sequence. (See *point of view*)

A double perspective can also be provided almost simultaneously through framing. This is by putting frames within frames. In *The Famous Five* (p. 26) a road block has been established by the police. Within this wide-angled frame is a smaller frame of the robbers' van in parallel time, driving onto the road. It is placed at the right of the main frame and its position shows us that a trap is being set up by the police. The next frame has a complex function. From this information provided both by the framing device and by the *mise en frame*, the first reading is that the robbers have been arrested. That is until we realise that the van is empty and then we understand the significance of the van driving *onto* the road. It means that they have avoided the road block and the empty van is a red herring. The narrative clues are thus both within the content of the frame and within the layout of the frames.

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix 2.3, p. 24

A more sophisticated, filmic use of frames can be seen in the opening of *Canardo* (p. 4). This uses six wide frames each taking the full width of the page. Although of equal width, the gradual increase of depth allows each subsequent frame to provide more information. We are taken from the first low angle, close-up frame of the carrot on the road, to a rabbit eating the carrot, to the speeding car, and to the inevitable collision. This sequence provides both enigma and tension through style and form.

Frames can also be broken. In *The Famous Five* story Timmy's race to Kirrin cottage is told through a series of horizontal and vertical rectangles and squares, all of different dimensions. The montage of these various shapes helps to create rhythm and pace. In order to evoke speed the artist has also used the device of allowing the images to break out of the frame borders. In contrast accelerated time can be represented by a series of a large number of 'wordless' frames. The rapidity of assimilating information through the images creates the speed of the chase. In *King Ottakar's Sceptre*, Tintin escapes his pursuers over a series of eighteen frames with only seven short speech bubbles (pp. 36-7).

The privileging of frames on a page by position or size may be used to help to follow a linear time scale or to highlight narrative developments. It may also allow a particular part to be fore-grounded whilst the surrounding frames provide additional, secondary, information or comment. Raymond Briggs uses this device in the day-dream sequence in *When the Wind Blows*. As nuclear war advances, James and his wife are shown reminiscing over their lives during World War Two. Briggs uses it again during the day-dream sequences of Jim, the lavatory attendant, in *Gentleman Jim*. In these types of sequences the removal of the normal black frame surrounded by white space signifies a period of unreality, dreaming, fantasy or unrealistic perceptions of the characters. I would suggest that this may not agree with Kress and van Leeuwen's analysis of non-visual phenomena which they say cannot be realised in the visual semiotic. Mental processes such as perception, affection and cognition have to have a 'senser', a person who does the act, to produce the phenomena. They do comment that the cinema has developed a set of projective



conventions for realising “mental processes, such as memories, dreams and hallucinations.” (pp. 76-77)

Another framing device is to employ a distorted angle or point of view to increase the tension, suggest emotion and create disequilibrium. It is used to indicate, for example, the internal disquiet of Canardo (p. 9) and the climax of the *Famous Five*. (pp.38-9) In order to signify something not within the present space-time continuum different styles of framing can be used. In *The Famous Five* (p. 17) Uncle Quentin tells the back-story of the Golden Galleon. To help establish this the frames have curved corners instead of the normal right angles. This is also combined with a change of colour tones between the action and the story telling. To underline the difference this section is also bounded at its beginning and end by unframed images confirming the temporal manipulation of this section. This structuring device of a non-framed image is significant. The frame being a major signifier, this absence of a frame is often used to highlight a climax. In the *Famous Five* it is used to show the 'unbounded' reaction of the Five at the £25,000 reward. (pp. 32-3)

Incomplete framing can also allow speech bubbles to be open so that the voices are carried through to the next frame. Not to fill in the background means that the geometry of the frame is only partly completed. When Ferdinand is getting drunk at the bar in *Canardo* (p. 9) his disorientation and psychological state, which are the results of being a platoon mascot in Vietnam, are conveyed. This is done not only through the style of drawing, the colour and the typography, but also through broken speech bubbles, the use of lines and incomplete frames.

Occasionally frames are shaped to allow the space around the frame to become significant, or for example as with a circular frame to intensify the image inside. On other occasions a 'joke' may be established through the frames. For example, in *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, (p. 34) the parenthetical joke's punch line is through the size of the frame. This takes up half a page in order to enclose a dinosaur's leg bone, which more than fulfils Snowy the dog's dreams.

The content of the frame also signifies its purpose in terms of the narrative structure. It can be progressive, as in *Going West* frame 4, or localised, holding the attention at a specific frame, as in frame 5,<sup>8</sup> where the camp fire is an ‘effect’ of the previous frame.

To summarise: the content and position of a frame determines its diegetic function; meaning is also conveyed through the size, shape and organisation of the frames.

### Point of View

Framing and point of view, or narrator/ee position, are linked. In *Canardo* (Appendix 2, p.24) Ferdinand is approaching a building, and the design indicates the multiple perspectives given within the frames. These include Canardo, the guard and the reader, sometimes simultaneously with the use of thought bubbles. Nodelman (1988) suggests that words tend to imply a single viewpoint that precludes other possible options. He suggests that this is the subjective view of the writer. An image, on the other hand, cannot force this subjective viewpoint, but only imply by evocation and attitude. The very ‘floating’ nature of the image, Barthes called them a “‘floating chain’ of signifieds”, (1977, p. 39) can provide this variety of views. Ong (1982) also implies this possibility of perspective when he states that, “...sight situates the observer outside what he views...”(p. 72).

Inside the frame of the comic the changing perspectives established through the design will imply the narrative position, subjective and objective, to be taken up by the reader. In *Tintin in America* (p. 40) we are given three perspectives: firstly that of Tintin watching the oncoming train as he lies on the track; secondly that of the train driver approaching the unknown obstacle; and finally that of the omniscient observer positioned both at the side of the wheels of the speeding train and behind Tintin as he watches the oncoming train. The point of view and positioning of the reader are thus constantly changing within and between the frames.

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix 2.1

Another example of this ability to change positioning within and between frames, limiting the floating nature of the image, comes from *Asterix and the Normans*, (p. 21) at the point when Justforkix is captured by the Normans. In a series of frames we see Justforkix's view of the Norman leader and the leader's view of the quivering Gaul. The next frame gives us Justforkix's point of view with the chief in menacing close-up. The angle and the framing emphasise Justforkix's vulnerability. However in *Asterix* the apparent menace and violence are undermined both by the words and by the style of the drawings. These create an ironical tone. This ability of text and image to comment ironically on each other is one function that differentiates the comic from the picture book type of illustration.

In darker mood in *Canardo* (p. 6), when Ferdinand enters Freddo's Bar the style is created by foreboding shadows, and the characters are redolent of the classic *film noir* found in the American cinema of the Forties and Fifties. The high angle of the establishing frame also provides the information of the power relationship between the two characters. This is also featured in the *mise en frame*. The interesting factor in this particular sequence is that our identification with Ferdinand is maintained throughout his meeting with the overpowering Kartler, another anthropomorphic character. This is achieved by always being positioned on the left of the frame, as though we are accompanying Ferdinand.

Finally, the comic uses the 'Dear reader' direct address style ('Let us take') particularly in the genre of comedy. In *Asterix and the Normans* (p. 29) Obelix and Timandahaf stop fighting to discuss a recipe. Suddenly Timandahaf looks out of the frame towards the reader with a bemused expression. This obviously indicates the unspoken non-diegetic question to the reader, "Why am I discussing a recipe with my opponent?" after which Timandahaf resumes his bellicose stance. In other words there is the fore-grounding of the 'device' for the audience for purposes of generic conventions of comedy..

## Juxtaposition and Montage

Inevitably, because the comic is made up of sequences, it means that juxtaposition and links must be integral to meaning. Russian formalists such as Pudovkin constructed theories of link montage to explain how a sequence of images in film could create meaning above and beyond their simple denotative level.<sup>9</sup> Eisenstein had used clash montage, that is the juxtaposition of apparently disparate images to create meaning. His purpose was to break the codes of realism to introduce a new stylised visual language.

“Just as cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order, the organism or embryo, so, on the other side of the dialectical leap from the shot, there is montage.

By what, then, is montage characterized and, consequently, its cell-the shot?

By collision. By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. By conflict. By collision.” (‘The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram’ from *Film Form* in Mast and Cohen, 1985, p. 97)

Montage works by manipulation of images through juxtaposition to establish dramatic or narrative meaning. It may animate a scene by a rapid montage of images as in a chase sequence, or create a pause and concentrate the reader's attention on a specific element which is of symbolic significance. Montage can also construct a social or political message, as in Eisenstein's intellectual or collision montage, which suggests that frames reflect or comment on each other. In the comic, juxtaposition, or insertion of frames use these ideas as narrative devices. In *The Calculus Affair* (p. 46) we move through three different but linked stories. These are: Tintin and Haddock flying in an aeroplane; a telephone conversation between their enemies on the ground; and a running joke about a plaster. Meaning is achieved among these three strands through the montage of the images.

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<sup>9</sup> In one experiment the same ‘neutral’ face was put against two different images. Each juxtaposition gave different meaning. Eisenstein created the theory of thesis, antithesis and synthesis for intellectual montage

Once there is montage, there is also ellipsis. The art of the comic is elliptical. The still images, which are separated into often disconnected frames, are re-connected by the reader. During this process the montage and the ellipsis are filled. Thus the reader completes the unstated narrative that occurs in the spaces *in between* the frames and in the *connections between* the frames. The semantic purpose of the gaps may be telegraphic to give information (Barthes' proairetic code) or evocative of questions or emotions (Barthes' hermeneutic code). One example is in *The Golden Galleon* (p. 38). Here there is a long, low-angle shot of a trolley entering a corridor accompanied by two prison warders. The point of view is then moved 180 degrees to behind the warders, with their backs framed by close ups of menacing hands. We then return to the previous front position and see the warders being attacked by the two men whose hands we have just seen in close-up. The next frame shows the robbers, now disguised in the warders' uniforms, running towards the reader. The final frame puts the reader back into the first frame position of this sequence. So within six frames the point of view has been moved five times and ellipses have allowed 'unseen' action, such as the change of clothes, to be read between the frames. At the same time enigmas have been evoked by allowing only partial information such as of the disembodied hands.

Another example comes from *Asterix and the Normans* (pp. 26-7). The Roman patrol, being too cowardly to intervene, has returned to camp to report on the fighting between the Gauls and the Normans. The centurion sends the patrol back to the battle. We see the white-faced soldiers marching back and the next frame shows the cause of their fear; the 'madmen' fighting. The strip then focuses upon one of the Roman soldiers, Decurion, approaching a series of stars. These, in the semiotics of comics and the context in this narrative, are symbolic signifiers for fighting. Words of support from Decurion's fellow soldiers are given, but they come from *between* the frames. The other cowardly soldiers are therefore unseen, hiding within the white spaces. Thus the off-frame space has a diegetic function allowing the montage to work either by revealing, hiding, or implying meaning.

## Movement and Sound

There are particular symbols that help to depict sound and movement in the comic form. Lines are an important way of indicating movement and sound. In the image, the icon, which may only be a sketch, represents the complete 'word'. The second part, which determines the action or sound and therefore indicates the precise meaning can be called the 'determinative' thus,

icon + determinative = ideogram.

In the comic this can be translated into:

sketch of child + speed lines = child running fast.

Thus the determinative in the form of lines signifies an abstract concept. In the example above it is that of relative speed. Often movement is shown at the beginning or end of its performance and lines are used to create both the speed and direction of the action. Movement can also be indicated by using multiple drawings in one frame. The effect is quite surreal perhaps giving someone several heads or several hands. Its meaning of rapidity which is conveyed by this 'blurring' of the image as though through 'persistence of vision' is a known comic device to a knowledgeable reader. In *Canardo* (p. 21) there is an example of one frame where the movement of the dogs is created through a combination of several devices including multiple images, onomatopoeic neologisms, curved lines and dust clouds.

## Sound

Lines can also help to convey sound. The slamming of a door in frame six of the *Judge Dredd* text<sup>10</sup> is indicated by lines along the door jamb. Sound may often be

<sup>10</sup> Appendix 2.4

indicated through non-words, such as ‘grrrrr’, or onomatopoeic words such as ‘buzz’. Styles of typography can also be used to help to convey sound, for example bold, large print may indicate the style of speech, as in the *Famous Five*, “**HURRAY!**”<sup>11</sup> Another signifier of sound is the design of speech bubble. A bubble with sharp, jagged edges would indicate sharp and loud sounds.

Sounds are thus often conveyed visually by appearance and by the use of phonetic reflections of noises. The absence of this antecedent can render silent the most animated of scenes. Bresson (in Roux, 1970, p. 70), controversially stated, “*un son évoque toujours une image, une image n’évoque jamais un son.*” (a sound always evokes an image, an image never evokes a sound.) It is interesting to put this theory to the test by watching a silent film. If, as an experiment, we take the example of Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* and the famous *Odessa Steps* sequence, we can see the people cheering and then screaming. Do these images evoke these sounds in the viewer or not? Do we hear in our imagination the soldiers marching or only see them through the images which do not evoke a sound? Are we using visual and auditory channels but within our own imagination rather than the physical transmission through sound waves? (Gauthier, ‘*image et son*’, in *Documents UFOLEIS*, March 1965)

## Speech Bubbles

The speech bubble is a specific signifying system of the cartoon and the comic. Kress and van Leeuwen see the bubble or balloon as representing a senser (thought) or a speaker (dialogue) so the processes are mediated through these forms. (1986, p. 67) We have already seen in discussing other aspects of the semiotics of the comic that the bubble can deliver many other meanings. Its shape can be curved, sharp, geometric, or incomplete, all of which have signification.

Unlike in a classic structured film or a novel, direct speech and thought can be given simultaneously through this device. In *The Famous Five* (p. 42) George is facing

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<sup>11</sup> Appendix 2.3

the robbers alone. Inside a spiked speech bubble she shouts, “Don’t come any closer”, whilst in the same frame a thought bubble, signified by a series of small bubbles says, “I can’t hold out much longer”. Interior thoughts and dreams are indicated through the bubbly appearance of the edge of the ‘thought’ bubble and the bubbly link with the ‘thinker’. As already stated, the typography can also indicate the loudness and sharpness of tone through signifiers such as sharp edges, size and thickness of line. In addition, if the ‘spoken words’ do not exactly reflect the ‘thoughts’ of the protagonist, the juxtaposition may create suspense, irony or tension. Images can therefore act as a counterpoint to what the words are saying, or as a reflection upon them. The position of the speech bubble can also indicate the order of speech, the role of the speaker, and the importance of the text.

## Typography

Typography, that is the shape and calligraphy of the words, is mostly used as a stylistic device to define and elaborate sound and movement. But it can also be used for more sophisticated purposes. For example in the public speech given in *Asterix and the Normans*, (p. 15) it is the Roman style typography that creates the formal address mode. Alternatively the quality of a trembling voice can be conveyed through wavering letter forms. In *Judge Dredd*,<sup>12</sup> the two different stories are signified by different case lettering. Frequently the convention for writing words in a comic is to use uppercase characters.<sup>13</sup> In terms of reading skills this convention may have an adverse effect upon the efficiency of decoding words particularly with weaker readers. The use of this style does not allow readers to use the visual clue of the shape of a word to help narrow down options. For example, the word shape of *crocodile* looks very different from that of *elephant* when written in lower case, but there are minimal difference when seen in upper case.

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<sup>12</sup> Appendix 2.4

<sup>13</sup> There are significant exceptions, for example Raymond Briggs uses both upper- and lowercase.



## Words and Images

There are two roles for written language in the comic. First, they convey spoken language and have a similar strongly elliptical nature. It is this style which writers such as James Joyce have tried to evoke in other literary forms. Here is an example from his work Ulysses. (1963, p. 26)

Stephen jerked his thumb towards the window saying  
 -That is God  
 Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!  
 What? Mr Deasy asked

Interestingly, this extract from Joyce's novel has many similarities with the way words are used in a comic. Joyce was trying to draw attention to the style, that is the signifiers, and to break from the apparent transparency of classic narrative structures, that is what is signified. He used a style, often called 'stream of consciousness', which was trying to make the action of writing the subject of the text. This was similar in intention to the way that Eisenstein used images when trying to use the technique of montage to create the meaning of the frame (or cell). In this extract from Ulysses the fragments of speech must be completed by associations. The comic uses both these 'classic' styles of ellipsis. There are also linking phrases, onomatopoeic words, use of punctuation and neologisms, which are similar to their use in comics. Here is an example from *Judge Dredd*.<sup>14</sup>

I assure you, Judge Dredd, our kitchen is clean  
 crash!  
 Dredd crashes through door saying  
 I'll be the judge of that  
 What's this clean o spray?  
 Er-y-yes

The elliptical nature of the comic text, both in the montage of images and in the style of the written text, relies upon the reader's skills in reconstituting meaning. It also allows the reader to be part of the making of meaning. Second, the words are the commentary or linking function. These may be pleonastic, that is provide a certain redundancy to avoid the confusion that could arise if interpretation was left completely to the images. As Barthes said:

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<sup>14</sup> Appendix 2.4

“all images are polysemous ...polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as dysfunction ...the various techniques are used are developed to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way to counter the terror of uncertain signs: the linguistic message is one of these techniques ...it is a matter of denoted description of the image ...corresponds exactly to an *anchorage* ... When it comes to the ‘symbolic message’, the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation ... (it limits ... the projective power of the image).” (1977, p. 39)

The balance between information in written text and imagination in image will always be in constant tension. In the back-story about the fate of Ferdinand’s girlfriend, which the waitress tells in *Canardo*, the frames are apparently unconnected. It is the ‘voice-over’ of the linking text that provides the coherence. The ellipses are too large for the visuals to carry the narrative alone. Such spaces can also form a means of ‘censorship’ so that action or images are suggested but not shown. This may be for particular narrative reasons of effect rather than for practical reasons of cutting the number of frames to fit a space.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of grammatical construction, or syntax, it is possible to see that the images may carry the nouns and the adverbial and adjectival elements, whereas the text may carry more verbs and action information.

For example, in Appendix 2.2 the words are, “Here we go. Heave Ho the lid’s sliding off, oof”. The double underlined words indicate verbs. These are combined with the image of a high angle view of three children pushing hard on sticks to lever off the lid of a tomb. This is set in a derelict graveyard. Here the single underlined words are nouns, adjectives and adverbs.

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<sup>15</sup> Although of course censorship of images of violence and sex has also occurred

Words also help to focus on what is important in the frame. The picture may contain information that is irrelevant to the action but adds to the apparent reality of the setting. In the *Famous Five*, we see a girl cycling hard along a road with a thatched cottage in the background. This has no other significance than to provide a reference to the type of story setting, which could be caricatured as ‘old England’. This helps construct the reality of the picture even if its structure of reality is bound up with reproducing an ideologically questionable version of reality.<sup>16</sup> The words also provide an additional schema to determine certain aspects such as emotion as in the last frame of *Canardo*.<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, the organisation can create cause and effect, for example the reason for the girl to leave the market so quickly in the *Famous Five*.<sup>18</sup> They also provide the syntactical relationship between parts of the pictures and the series of pictures.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

In this analysis the specific elements have been taken as discrete forms, but obviously to understand the totality of the message it is necessary to read holistically. Given that there are different signifying systems at work in the comic filtered through cultural, perceptual and other frames of knowledge of the individual reader, the complexity of any reading event is evident. It is essential that these diverse systems are capable of providing a synthesis by playing upon each other to create a unified structure of meaning within the reader. Firstly, this reveals, the complex and diverse nature of the comic form, secondly it identifies the areas of knowledge which readers require to understand the idiosyncratic nature of the comic form, and thirdly it shows that readers must move between image and word as they read and understand their function as well as being able to decode or ‘recode’ as in Hawkes’ view.

Comparisons have also been drawn between film language and between the comic. There are, however, significant differences. In reading the comic the control of

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<sup>16</sup> Appendix 2.2

<sup>17</sup> Appendix 2.3

<sup>18</sup> Appendix 2.2 frame 6.

<sup>19</sup> Frames 1, 2 and 3 Appendix 2.2

reading time and order are partly within the reader's grasp rather than entirely within the director's organisation. Time and space are intrinsic to the narrative structure. Bluestone said that the novel can describe time and only imply space, while film depicts space and can only imply time (Nodelman, 1988, p. 239). Iser sees the difference between a novel and a film in that the film of the scene 'excludes me from a world which I can see, but which I have not helped to create.' (1980, p. 139) The comic of course can both depict and describe. Often time passing is described, for example: "The next morning...", "While Asterix is being held hostage by the Normans..."; "Let us take advantage of this brief respite to seek out our hero...". Space on the other hand is depicted within the frames through iconic representations.

The two codes, analogue and digital, shade into each other. This does not mean that there is anarchy within the reading. What it does suggest is a style of reading that does have many similarities to the way that we read a film, that is in reading images. It also reflects the way that we would read a more elliptical written text. The codes describe a literacy where the readers have actively to fill the space between frames with words or with images; where readers may thus remember more than they have seen, where ellipses evoke and provoke.

This review of the language of the comic is not exhaustive. In it I have tried to select examples of the significant codes and conventions and to make generalised points about how comic language works, rather than to do a detailed semiotic analysis of individual examples. What I hope it has shown is that the visual and the verbal are not separate; they have aspects of each other, and that these are exploited within the comic form. Kress and van Leeuwen have also stressed the "essential interchangeability of visual and verbal participants," (1996, p. 55). These are important points which are used in the analysis of the work done on exploring how readers read comics.

This chapter concludes the first part of this study where the relationship between theoretical perspectives on literacy, reading, and textual semiotics has been set in the context of the reading community and of experience of using comics in education. Where work with students has been referred to it has been used to show how the

theories have helped to develop insights into the practical research. The second part of this study begins with a discussion on the field research based upon work done with students with a range of abilities. It concludes with a discussion on three possible models which could be applied to understanding how comics are read.

## Chapter 5

# Research Strategies : Methodologies, Methods and Research Tools

### Introduction

The second part of this study begins with a discussion on the final design of the research and relates decisions to the issues raised in the literature review. It explains why a case study approach was used. It shows how theoretical positions and practical factors informed the choice of research methods and tools. As explained in the background to the research in Chapter 2, work with comics in formal and informal situations had been undertaken over a span of years within different institutional contexts. It had been work which had collected primary data, but in comparatively isolated units. The questions asked were based upon the practice of teaching at the time rather than through any coherent underlying methodology. Robin Usher (1995) states that there is “the need both to examine the activity of research as a social practice, embedded in language, culture and history and always involving issues of autobiography, ethics and power.” (p. 22) Ivanic’s thesis of identity in academic writing considers these issues with students. If we allow that research is conducted within these types of subjective framework, then we must consider the particular processes as having similar constraints. Even a systematic study of reading responses can only reflect a moment and identify certain phenomena; they can never, perhaps particularly in the case of a teacher/researcher, provide definitive cause and effect independent of the context in which the study is done.

The form of the texts chosen was itself redolent with issues around culture, status and power which writers such as Barthes and Ivanic in different contexts have raised and which were discussed with relation to literacy in the review. These have seen the institutionalising of particular texts as classic and appropriate for interpretation in

an educational system, acting as a potent ‘normalizing’ force. The comic is perhaps seen as an inappropriate ‘normalizing’ force given that it has a rather ambiguous relationship with education and similar institutions, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in other areas of the world (Mann, 1988 on C4 Comic Book Confidential). Contradictorily the result of this relationship has also created the potential to be a positive influence in providing information, entertainment and education in an empowering form particularly with disenfranchised groups (Selwood and Irving 1993; Interface, Community Arts Project, Reading in Mailout, 1990). If I had taken, for example, a purely textual approach as with a semiotic analysis, it would have taken the comic out of the reader’s environment in which it was being used. The aim was to absorb the most useful parts of the different approaches to texts, readers and practices into a coherent strategy for researching readers, (Cohen *et al*, Educational Research and Development, 1982)

### **Methodological Issues for final research**

In the literature review various means of measuring reading effectiveness were highlighted including instrumental comprehension taxonomies. They provide baselines for skills assessment, but do not explore other construction processes between text and readers. Research has looked at the difficulties of exploring the gap between the internal and external responses. The gap is the distance between the process of responding within the individual reader through the primary and introspective responses and influenced by psychological factors experienced by the reader, and the gauged distance between this and the considered and retrospective secondary responses given by the reader. This type of question has been particularly important in the area of literature appreciation. Rosenblatt states that “It is important to make sure that research techniques do indeed reveal aesthetic sensitivity and that research design takes into account the process of evocation and response” (in Cooper, C.R., 1985, p.44). Rosenblatt suggests here observing the primacy of readers’ responses rather than performing an analytical deconstruction of textual meaning .

How can we attempt to explore such responses given that the primary response is inaccessible to the researcher whilst the secondary response will be distorted by various factors such as the reader's own selection? In addition, if we accept the logical conclusion that individual readers will provide individual answers because of cultural, psychological and other variable factors, we are on a route to anarchy in any research. It is therefore necessary to assume that there is a core of agreed understanding between the individual responses (even if as Barthes would suggest ideologically created, naturalized and therefore not 'innocent') associated with texts<sup>1</sup>. The question of accessing the understanding of and responding to texts involves 'introspective recall' if only 'through a glass darkly'. It is this meaningful interaction between the text and reader which Iser and Rosenblatt with literary texts, and Gombrich and Berger with visual texts, amongst others, have in various ways tried to describe. The methodological issue for this study was how to marry these approaches to answer the question of how readers read comics.

From the discussion above and the review of the work done in this area, there can be seen to be two broad and basic approaches that are possible for this type of question. These can be briefly summarised as the quantitative reading skills approach and the qualitative ethnographic and case study response approach. Obviously each leads to different methods and tools being applied and favours different models of reading. In the background research discussed in Chapter 2 both approaches had been used. The cloze procedure, although small-scale, used a quantitative approach and the reader response a qualitative approach. From the pilot studies it was evident that a form of case study, that is a qualitative approach, was going to be the most satisfactory of the possible options. Influencing factors such as the type of students involved, the contexts in which the research would be undertaken and the resources available were influential. Additionally, the focus of the research question meant that revealing readers' processes through the text and their response would be suited to a qualitative approach.

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<sup>1</sup> David Morley's work on audiences of Nationwide (1980).



The strategy was therefore to develop a method where readers would respond as freely as possible to texts to reveal their reading processes and then to propose conclusions about these processes. The following discussion considers the advantages and disadvantages of each of the possible alternative approaches which were considered to fulfil these criteria.

## **Research Methods**

### *The Experimental Model*

This type of research is based upon a 'scientific' methodology. There have been many studies and a considerable amount of research done on reading and comprehension based upon this approach. Many of these research studies are structuralist in methodology. Barrett's Taxonomy (in Melnick and Meritt, 1972, pp. 55-60) is one example of how reading and comprehension of written texts can be analysed within a formal structure. One way of applying this style of investigation to reading comics would have been to have taken a frame-by-frame analysis with a 'before and after' structure of response. There are obvious advantages to this type of research in that it has an apparent objectivity and is easily replicated. But this method with the types of research tools involved had certain limitations for this study that could have possibly skewed the results. These were:

- Responses (data) would need to be categorised and in so doing any individuality of responses may be lost as they would be ignored or fitted into pre-conceived categories. Concomitant with this is that a previously designed framework of possible answers would not allow for students with alternative but justified responses. Nor would it allow for misunderstandings through a breakdown in communication.
- Unless the sessions were designed to be continuous and rigorously supervised any experimental work could not identify other external influences that may contaminate the results. For example, there could be differences in the context of

the experiment even within the same classroom and at the same time of day.

There could also be external discussions or other types of input brought into the experiment from outside, if the experiments were conducted during more than one session. These may or may not be known to the researcher. As this study was undertaken as individual research, the difficulties in organising simultaneous and multiple research bases were believed to be too complex to administer.

- Another factor mitigating against this type of design was that individual student responses could not be regulated where differences were due to internal psychological factors, such as tiredness, boredom and so on. Nobody in the real world will react in exactly the same way to a similar set of circumstances even with the best-designed of experiments.
- Any experimental group would need to be compared with a similarly established parallel control group. Where the research was done over a period of time it would also be necessary to explore whether the group with ‘special’ sessions showed any differences as a result of the input, which were not just part of other factors such as maturation. It would be logistically difficult to establish such a group based upon factors such as gender, age, reading age, knowledge and so on, with the resources available.
- The experimental group itself may feel special, either positively or negatively, and therefore react differently or create a bias to the work. It would be impossible to stop individual members of the groups communicating with each other unless in completely different institutions and immediately the consistency of the context of the experiment would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate.

As a result of these factors it was decided not to use the quantifiable experimental research method. Another significant factor was a rejection of the assumption that meanings and primary responses of readers could be collected as empirical evidence, quantifiable, and by implication fitting into preconceived categories. It was also decided not to follow this style of positivist research because of the difficulty in

controlling the environmental factors and human interaction as well as not being subtle enough in terms of defining categories for collecting data. The research question was trying to uncover, as far as possible, the primary immediacy of response rather than the exact circumstances of the event. On a practical level such a style of research raised too many logistical difficulties.

### *Ethnographic Research*

Ethnography is a form of research that attempts to understand a social situation by participation and observation, (Hammersley, What's Wrong with Ethnography?, 1992). The researcher attempts to be, or is, part of the social interaction and devises hypotheses based on their understanding of the observations.<sup>2</sup> This type of research is associated with social anthropologists who are studying different cultures and ethnic groups. Traditional ethnography focuses on the natural setting and participation of the social actors. There are two basic criteria: first the aim is to study a system which shares common boundaries, and second there is the need to be reflexive in the collection of data. Ethnography has strong links with the type of research which comes under the umbrella term of action research.

### *Action Research*

In this the researcher is also a participant actor in the events (Kemmis and McTaggart, The Action Research Planner, 1981). Although there are many different types of research which could be involved in action research they have similarities in that the paradigm includes planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The substantive act is combined with a research procedure to evaluate the action. This can be organised by the teacher within the classroom context and not initiated externally. In this form it builds particularly on the work of Stenhouse who suggested that research should not only be grounded in the reality of the classroom but also be in the control of the teacher (Stenhouse, 1983; 1985).

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<sup>2</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) Ethnography: Principles in Practice

There are advantages in this type of research for this study. They allow for natural situations and small groups of students. In fact this research did not change or ‘act’ on methods of teaching or other areas of the classroom context, except in the pilot work. It was intended to observe and to understand a process rather than a system. In this the analysis was reflexive.

Whether a qualitative or quantitative approach is taken the basic purpose of the research is to collect useful data. The following is an assessment of data collection techniques and their application and usefulness to this study:

## **Research Tools**

### *Questionnaire and Survey*

Questionnaires are themselves a specialist form which require specific techniques as anyone who has tried to design a questionnaire on the simplest of topics will know. The possibilities of misunderstandings both by the subjects and the interpreter are legion. In this study a questionnaire was used initially to identify students who had read or who were current readers of comics.<sup>3</sup> These were followed by informal interviews to establish a working relationship with the students as well as explore attitudes that might have influenced the work, and to choose the final pairs.

It was concluded that this style of survey model was an inappropriate method for further use in this research. Some of the most convincing reasons came out of the work with the LSS students. The use of questionnaires was found to be limited unless the answers were pre-selected into definite categories and help was given in understanding the structure of the questionnaire. The exercise became one of having to teach the students how to fill in a questionnaire. It was therefore regarded as inefficient as a means of collecting data from these students.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 7

Secondly there were obviously going to be difficulties in designing a questionnaire to which a wide range of abilities would be able to respond effectively. The type of language and vocabulary used would have to be very controlled and limited to enable the LSS students to participate fully. If questionnaires had to be designed to be understood by these students the basic nature of information that would be possible to acquire could not justify the technique.

Additionally, in designing a questionnaire, assumptions would have to be made about the categories which might be used and into which category the data might be placed. This would assume that a theory had already been established and was being verified or refuted by the data being collected. Another difficulty with the questionnaire, particularly if it allowed for open rather than closed responses, was that the initial responses might throw up new areas or queries which it would be difficult to track back upon. The answers might also reveal new conceptual categories not initially predicted. This would not allow for a reflexive process to realign responses. The types of responses gathered which might be qualitatively interesting would not be easily quantifiable for the questionnaire data to be useful.

It was therefore felt that this type of research design was not responsive enough to collect data where the theory that was being tested was not predictive of results but descriptive of processes.

### *Structured interviews*

As the interviewer could use a tape recorder as a research tool, this did not have the same drawback as the questionnaire method in collecting data in terms of the reading and writing skills of the weaker students, but a structured interview would not allow the researcher (or the respondents) to wander off the categories that had been pre-established. Results would therefore be explanatory rather than helping to develop a theory. Like the questionnaire, the opportunities for new categories or insights would be possibly lost in such a narrowly focused, deductive form. Evidence from the pilots had already proved that the artificiality of the interaction in this process

could limit student responses. This style of research is more suited to large-scale projects where statistical data is being collected.

### *Taped interviews*

The recorded interviews with the Learning Support students showed that they could develop points when they were able to focus upon specific requests for information. This was done in the initial period when asking them about their reading profiles. When the questions were focused on expected 'right' answers to the tasks it was noticeable that students were trying pick up points from the researcher's comments rather than providing personal responses. The tapes revealed that the style of interview tended to become interventionist and directed to specific points, because a more open-ended statement or question often led to long silences or personal comments as the students were unsure as to what was the expected response. For example when asked what appeal the comic had for them Kevin's response was "I'm looking for a gun". The questions had to be directed to concrete answers. Open-ended questions gained little response.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

These had the advantage of allowing students to respond more openly and more naturally in this inductive style. The less artificial nature, and the more expected teacher/students interaction, created a less inhibiting situation for many of the students. It was also possible for the interviewer to respond to the categories suggested by the conversation in a reactive rather than predictive form where questions were general and non-specific.

But evidence from the previous work, particularly the reader-response study, had revealed that even this semi-structured intervention was less satisfactory in terms of responses than when students were left alone to discuss the texts with their peers. There was still evidence of an agenda being set which was answering the question: "How does the teacher/researcher think that readers read comics?"

This evidence of a freer, less inhibited and therefore truer reflection was also evident in setting activities.

### *Tasks*

Some of the most useful background information came from exercises during the pilot stage where the students were recorded whilst having to perform certain tasks. This allowed free discussion or description with the tape recorder as eavesdropper rather than the focus of the task. For example, the students were asked to describe a picture with all the details that they could see such as characters, settings, positions so that another person could pick out the picture from a group of very similar ones. This allowed the students to describe the picture in detail and to give further unseen information, that is developing inferences, to differentiate it from other very similar pictures. The evidence from this type of task and its recording showed that in conducting the research it was essential to give the students a specific task which firstly would force them to develop hypotheses and therefore give more external secondary evidence of their thought processes, and secondly would take their focus off the act of recording. The type and style of discussion generated by giving only one frame where they had to hypothesise as well as describe, was one of the deciding factors in giving only part of a text to read for the final study (Edwards and Westgate, *Investigating Classroom Talk*, 1987). It also raised areas of possible future research discussed in Chapter 10.

Some of the tasks set were found to be inappropriate. For example the re-construction of a page of a graphic novel from cut single frames became a shape matching exercise and not a narrative re-construction for the LSS group. Any further exercise required the frames to be either identical in shape and size or cut and chosen randomly from photocopies of the same page. This would ensure that the narrative evidence within the frame was the means by which reconstruction was attempted and not from the external dimensions or shapes of the frames. Similarly the GCSE students used their knowledge of the conventions of a comic layout when pair 6 in a similar task said, "This has got to be the end because he signed it".

*Taped discussions*

When left in their control the tape recorder was initially an object to be played with for the LSS students. In my normal teaching groups the tape recorder both to record discussions and as a means of giving information is a regular part of teaching, but this appeared not to be so with these students. Time therefore had to be spent acclimatising students to its presence. It was a contaminating factor in many of the discussions in the pilot as the students played with the tape recorder and the external microphone. Given that all the students had tape recorders at home and knew how to work them, it was surprising that the distraction effect of trying to record in the classroom was so noticeable. Even with the GCSE and A level students there was also some initial resistance to the tape-recorder, which I felt was more to do with having their voices permanently stored and with a certain amount of self-image phobia. Once I explained that the recordings would only be listened to by myself, tape recording was accepted and they agreed to do the readings.

It was also found from recording the group in the pilot that results were more coherent and more easily analysed from the tape recordings if done with pairs rather than groups of students. This was logistically more manageable when having to position microphones to pick up comments, and it meant that an internal rather than an external microphone could be used. It was also easier to identify fewer voices on the tapes when there were only two students recording simultaneously, and it gave clearer speech evidence without too many confusing overlaps. It had the additional advantage that with only two speakers it forced most students to participate actively and thus to provide recorded evidence. Paired discussions were therefore decided upon as the most efficient form to collect the data for the research.

It had been noted, particularly with the reader-response study (Appendix 4, 1989), that students gave better less inhibited data when they were left alone with the tape recorder. This did run the risk of students not following instructions. An example of this was when an A level pair turned off the tape recorder in order to have an off-air discussion. It was also observed that the responses were richer when there were as



few guidelines as possible to structure the process. The evidence from the reader-response research had revealed that rather than being helpful in focusing students onto specific areas of discussion, the detailed comprehension-style questions such as, “Why is the general angry?” were irrelevant to the way that the students wanted to read the texts. The questions encouraged an imposed meaning by indicating the type of information which was thought important, rather than revealing the actual process of reading and the meaning that the students themselves constructed.

### *Decisions*

Although not themselves classic examples of action research or ethnographic research these methodologies had provided certain guidelines for helping to establish a coherent research study and develop methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the data. For example, one major factor important for this research tradition is ecological validity. By using students already within teaching groups this research was not only within a 'natural' setting but with a group who came from a similar system. Environmental factors, such as withdrawal, friendship groups, group dynamics would therefore be less contaminating factors. It also allowed for the reflexive process to be adopted on the material gathered. Because the results are based upon detailed observation of activities and of reader response the element of reflexivity, “. . . of developing hypothesis,” (Hopkins, 1985) was essential for the teacher-researcher. Even so this research, though underpinned by such interests, was targeted more specifically at collecting data in a controlled series of reading events rather than altering specific actions which is the focus of action research.

The design was of an ‘experimental’ situation in which the respondents were situated within a particular controlled framework but which allowed for developing rather than directing responses. The control of the reading data was in the hands of the students thus providing qualitative data. The collection of data from the particular method adopted allowed for the teacher-researcher to produce evidence systematically upon specific points (Simons, 1980). This gave a more accurate, controlled and representative picture than data gathered by means of *ad hoc* processes. The themes and categories that were identified by the work of parallel



pairs in each research group meant that idiosyncratic data from a single pair did not skew the data. The design of the research meant that the data was to be verified by *frequency*, that is the number of times it was identified; the *source*, who suggests the idea or category, that is did it appear from the researcher or from the students; and the *range* of students who mention the factor or category, that is the 'spread' over the student 'body'. This is a process referred to as saturation. By employing these procedures of validation a grounded theory, that is a theory grounded in the data applicable to a specific case, can be formed. There was such a dialectical relationship in this research between the building of a theory and the data collection:

“Although this method of generating theory is a continuously growing process - each stage after a time is transformed into the next - earlier stages do remain in operation simultaneously throughout the analysis and each provides continuous development to its successive stage ...”  
(Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.105).

The objectivity of this style of classroom-based or action approach and methodology has of course been much debated. It is hoped that by not imposing frameworks but identifying them subsequently, it is possible to say that the readers' responses have been more objectively assessed rather than being given a totally subjective explanation by the researcher. That is they are validated by the participants. On the other hand it could be argued that any meaningful categorising must be part of the researcher's pre-conceptions for which they are searching, if unconsciously, and are therefore retrospectively subjective. By using the qualitative data available, and by approaching the final research through various pilot studies, the strategies undertaken in this research, with the analysis and inferences grounded in the research data, are dependable.

To summarise: this was classroom research based upon a series of activities. The data was the recording and analysis of paired readers' taped responses to selected and partial comic texts. As this was a case study approach, the general conclusions would be tentative, but it was hoped that the design of the research would mean that the tasks could be reproduced and that the methods be applied to other studies.

## The Texts

Not only was it necessary to find a method which would incorporate the specific nature of working with LSS students, but it was also necessary to choose texts for these students which had a simple structured form in terms of layout, pictorial design and narrative. (see Study Appendix 3 for difficulties in using comic texts)

There was resistance to working with the graphic novel by some of the group. Such texts were perceived not to be ‘work’. As Morgen Jansen (1977) noted in his study of readers’ choices, retarded readers chose a thick book as a visual determinant for choice of reading because it was “a matter of prestige” (p.208). Pairs from the other educational levels did not have this problem about the perceived prestige of the text. They apparently did not feel that their literacy was being challenged by the type of text they were being asked to read. So in order to position the recordings in an organic rather than separate area of study, and provide the students with a perceived justification for reading comics, they were set in the wider context of media studies work.

The selection and analysis of the texts were based upon the insights on codes and narratives given in the work, amongst others, of Saussure, (1959), Barthes, (1975) and Eco, (1979). The texts were chosen from extended narratives in different genres and with different styles, but all were based upon the combination of image and text.

The use of a controlled focused reading was also seen as a pre-requisite to limit the number and range of responses in order to make the amount of data manageable but still significant. The full-length text, as used in the reader response study, although having the advantage of eliciting responses to a developed narrative would provide too wide a range of data. It also had the disadvantage of providing the full text which would not allow the challenge for the students of building narrative options from partial information and therefore force them to hypothesise from the evidence in front of them. The design was intended to generate a response to the text rather

than a descriptive re-telling of the story. It was intended to force questions to be asked about the who, the why and the wherefore. A short extract also allowed the students to concentrate for a fairly intensive period so that the task did not become too burdensome and it limited the amount of talk outside the task and the text.

These two latter factors had been signalled as important in the work with the adult basic education students and with the LSS students.

## **Students and the Classroom Contexts**

The conditions of each session could not be directly repeated but were as similar as possible. Each pair was given identical verbal directions from a written sheet<sup>4</sup> and seated in similar positions. Variables such as the limits of the timetable, the teacher input, and other environmental factors were not taken into account in the analysis of the data.

This context, as well as the relationship of the researcher to the students, was felt to be important in the research. The students were all within the ‘natural’ setting of the College which they attended, but the situation was ‘artificial’ in that they were asked to work apart from the class or group, partly for clarity of recording, partly to allow for fewer interruptions. Even though in all cases the work was developed to arise naturally from the work done by the class as a whole it was still an artificial or experimental situation in terms of reading a comic. Where it was necessary to use students I was not actually teaching I had to rely upon the selection of ‘volunteers’ by their own teacher. I had also to comply with the expectations of those teachers. In the reader research on the graphic novel for example, the children also produced drawings and wrote about the work. This was not initially part of the research design, but it came about as part of the expectation of their teacher that they would produce something more tangible than talk. Similarly I developed a series of teaching events for all sessions I took with LSS students in order for the department to feel that the work could be justified through outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix 7

In the pilot with the LSS students there were additional factors which became relevant when looking both at a research design and at the results which I was getting from these students. I was not a regular teacher for this group of students and it took several weeks to be accepted and recognised as a member of their teaching team. Once accepted it had an unforeseen consequence in that I was drawn into their intimate circle of known teachers in the College, which meant that the role of researcher and observer was being lost to the very interactive role of the teacher with this group of students.

Another possible factor was that these students were being withdrawn from their normal teaching groups. There was obviously some initial resistance to being withdrawn. One factor in this resistance was that they were leaving their normal routine which is an essential structure for this type of student. A second factor which influenced the resulting group dynamics was that because the group was selected by their language teacher on certain criteria such as literacy levels, they were leaving their friendship groups with whom they would have preferred to work. A third, perhaps more subtle factor was that for students in this category withdrawal may have been a reminder of stigmatisation in previous educational contexts.

As social skills of interaction were less developed than with the other groups it took longer to establish working pairs. The students had to become used to working with each other in a different context as well as to working with me. One of the limitations was the way in which group dynamics became a dominant feature of the sessions. This, combined with the effect of the researcher getting too close to the subjects and influencing responses and therefore creating distortion or bias, was a key issue at this point.

In reflecting on these points it was apparent that in order not to impose a conceptual and affective reality upon readers about how they should understand the comics, the given task should be as open as possible for the readers.

### *Discussion*

The final design was based upon the practice and experience of working with the comic and the evidence from the different studies undertaken over a range of texts. The decisions on the research framework were arrived at as a result of the investigation into the literature around reading, texts and literacy (Chapter 3), the preliminary work (Chapter 2) and the methodological decisions discussed above.

The decisions are summarised below:

- To use pairs of students at various levels of reading ability to read a variety of texts. From these comparative readings to investigate the different reading styles. By asking them to externalise their processes as far as possible to a partner.
- To build a semiotic framework through textual analysis and student responses on which to map the readings. This would reference the specific nature of reading the visual and verbal languages involved in the comic.
- By integrating these two discourses to consider whether any general conclusions could be made about how readers synthesise visual and verbal languages in narrative to create meaning.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the possible methods and research tools that could have been chosen to investigate how readers read comics. It has indicated the reasons and justification for the final research design which was a systematic study of responses from recorded data. This was to prove to be the most efficient method of collecting preliminary information on reading styles with comics. The data that was collected was to be integrated with an analysis of the texts. As discussed in the previous chapter this took a semiological perspective similar to that taken by Roux (1970), Barthes (1977) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) although this research was

undertaken prior to the publication of the latter work. Rather than the focus of the research, the textual analysis was complementary to the reading response data. A detailed semiological analysis, as done by Barthes in S/Z for example, would have swamped or skewed the analysis of the readers' responses. My interest was in the way readers responded to the two systems, verbal and visual, and how, or if, they integrated or transferred skills or knowledge between systems. It must be acknowledged though that the texts chosen were significant in the style of discourse adopted by the readers. Although I did provide overall numerical summaries of structures they are less satisfactory as an analytical tool than the discussions on the individual readings. The next chapter, which continues the central part of this study, describes the field research undertaken and uses examples from the data to illustrate and support the arguments being constructed.

## Chapter 6

### The Field Research: Implementation

#### Introduction

In this chapter the final field research design and its implementation are described. The previous studies (Chapter 2) had provided useful insights into the advantages and disadvantages of different research styles. Each of the studies had used the same form of text but with a variety of ages, abilities and different institutional contexts. They had also been pedagogically designed for different purposes and had therefore adopted different philosophical approaches. Their review had helped to focus methodological issues and point towards the most useful and appropriate methods and tools, given firstly the research question and secondly contextual and logistical factors. In Chapter 5 there is a consideration of the general issues concerning methodologies, methods and tools to be adopted. From these it was decided that a qualitative approach which entailed building up a description of the particular from a narrowly focused exercise would be the most viable method. In this approach the presence of the teacher/researcher and the relationship with the students became significant in that they were an integral part of the research process. The knowledge of the contexts and the students thus provided what could be described as an ethnographic bias to the study. This may have created factors such as distortion in the choice, analysis and interpretation of the data, but the observations have also been validated through the data produced by the readers.

The research was focused upon a specific age group (16-17years) that is the first year of post-compulsory education, but with a spread of ability across three different groups. These were: Learning Support students with special needs (LSS); General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE); and General Certificate of Education (A Level). The aim of this design was to look at the range of responses to see how readers of different abilities read the combination of images and texts in the extended narrative discourse of the comic form. From these significant similarities and



differences would help to identify the processes that achieved meaningful readings. A summary of the design can be seen in Figure 6.1

*Figure 6.1 Research Design by student pairs and texts:*

Level	LSS			GCSE			A level		
Pairs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Texts									
A	W&C	C&C	K&I						
B	W&C	C&C	K&I	M&B		S&D	G&B	B&M	J&J
C					H&L	S&D	G&B		J&J
D				M&B	H&L		G&B	B&M	

Letters A-D = texts

Numbers = paired students

W&C = initial letters of student names

## The Institution and The Students

The choice of one institution in which to undertake the research had obvious logistical as well as research advantages. As it was a single institute it resolved the ecological issues involving context. Other factors such as establishing student/researcher relationship were also more easily managed. The readers chosen for this study also came from a limited and therefore similar catchment area, which could generally be regarded as suburban.<sup>1</sup>

Queen Mary's College (QMC), Basingstoke is a Sixth Form College established when Hampshire Local Education Authority created a system of secondary schools covering the 11-16 age range. Post-compulsory education was moved into Further

<sup>1</sup> This is of course a generalisation as there are significant differences even within the catchment area, in terms of social class and educational background.

Education Colleges, Sixth Form and Tertiary Colleges. The college has traditionally catered for A level students or for those wishing to re-sit GCSEs and then enter a further academic programme. It has recently, as a result of the re-organisation of Further Education in the 1990s, expanded the number and type of courses available and has broadened its student base in terms of age, ability and geographic location. The majority of students are still in traditional academic programmes. The College also has a large department that caters for students with special needs (LSS). These students have specially devised programmes of study to provide support for their particular requirements.

Although there was no design attempt to pair participants into similar socio-economic groups or in other ways such as gender, it was felt that the single institution did provide a grouping of type of participants. It also reduced the difficulty of trying to control variables in terms of age and academic programme of students. Obviously these students had chosen to stay on in full time education, for whatever reason. The pairs in the GCSE and A Level groups were taken from the teaching groups of the teacher/researcher. They were towards the end of their first academic year at QMC. Each student was a volunteer and therefore positive in approach to the research, but also as a volunteer was self-selected. This explains why most of the pairs were single sex and often, although not necessarily, 'friendship' pairs.<sup>2</sup> That is they were prepared to work together, but did not necessarily have other common references outside the classroom. The LSS students were chosen from the group selected by their own teacher (see comments in the Pilot Study 1993 on the problems associated with this type of external selection process). The questionnaire was given to this group partly to ensure that those chosen had knowledge of comics.<sup>3</sup> Therefore each of the readers brought their knowledge of similar texts even if from a wide range of styles and genres. They were able to define the special characteristics of the comic form in the general terms of images, frames, speech bubbles and other comic devices. As the students had individual and different knowledge of specific styles and content in their previous reading profile they also

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<sup>2</sup> friendship pair is defined here as specific to the teaching group. Individual timetables mean that most of these students may only meet in a specific subject.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 7

responded individually to the different comics used in the research. These factors were part of the ethnographic map of the research.

Each pair went through a similar process of preparation, so that the work appeared to arise organically from their studies rather than to appear as 'special'. In this way it was hoped that the responses would be more spontaneous. This preparatory work included the use of recording responses to class work. It had been found that in spite of the technology being readily available to all the students, both at home and in college, the presence of the tape-recorder could be either inhibiting or distracting when used as a tool. This could affect the data.<sup>4</sup>

In the study the students are identified by their first names or initials and by their pair number:

*Figure 6.2*

<b>LSS Department</b>	Carrie and Wendy (1) Chris and Chris (2) Ian and Kevin (3)
<b>GCSE group</b>	Mark and Ben (4) Hannah and Lindsay (5) Dan and Sarah (6)
<b>A level group</b>	Beverley and Gina (7) Ben and Martin (8) Jim and James (9)

pairs are numbered for ease of reference in the research discussion

## The Research Design

For reasons already discussed, transcripts of taped pair responses were to be the prime data. In order to collect this data the pairs were sat facing each other with a tape recorder to the side of them. The tape recorder had an internal microphone. This was in order to make the process of recording as concealed as possible. It also

<sup>4</sup> See pilot study discussion

prevented the students playing with the microphone and being distracted from the task set, as they had been in the pilot study with the LSS students.

Each pair was presented with two photocopied extracts from different texts. One person in turn was instructed to read and describe one of the pages to their partner who could not see it. The latter was able to make notes or diagrams to help them conceptualise the page and remember significant details. This tactic of having a ‘blind’ partner was used to ensure that first there was recordable talk for analysis, secondly that any inhibitions about recording voices were overcome quickly; thirdly that there were no long silences caused by lack of specific direction before anyone spoke, and finally to try to generate discussion through question and answer as the blind partner tried to conceptualise the page. After this reading process the participants were asked to discuss ideas on possible narrative development, closures, genres or characters. This last tactic was employed in order to encourage more explicit reasoning and suppositions particularly from the reader as they tried to externalise their thoughts about the page for their partner. The roles were reversed for the second extract.

A verbal explanation of the exercise was given to each pair so that they were clear as to the purpose and to the methods involved. This also had the advantage of ensuring there was no miscuing in reading the instructions. A printed sheet of the instructions was also given as an *aide mémoire* containing the same information as the verbal instructions<sup>5</sup>. The students were then left alone within the classroom to carry out the task. The taped results were collected at the end of each session and the activity discussed with the students. This plenary session was not part of the research design. It was felt to be a better experience for the students to be able to feed back their feelings on the task and therefore educationally valuable. It was also helpful in clearing up misconceptions that may have occurred during transcription. For example, when listening to Ben and Martin’s conversation [text B] it is possible to hear that they had turned off the tape recorder at a certain point. This was because

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix 7.2

they had wanted to clear up a misunderstanding and therefore the reader (Martin) had shown his partner the page and they had not wanted this 'cheating' to be recorded.

The tapes were transcribed and colour-coded according to the type of reference made (see below). Annotations and interpretative comments were placed at the side. Links forward and backward showing references and review of points were drawn by lines.<sup>6</sup> Constant listening and re-working with the transcripts allowed for the interpretative comments to become more detailed and also for comparative points between readings to be made. It was in this on-going 'active' research that the theoretical ideas based on actual events began to emerge. This process of reflection and analysis, and reflection on analysis, continued throughout the writing of this thesis.

In using the transcripts as evidence the following format is used:

- Each line on the transcripts is numbered for the purposes of referencing in the discussion
- The initial letter of the speaker is used only when they take up the conversation
- Where words are directly quoted from the transcript this is indicated in the discussion by inverted commas
- To avoid irrelevant sounds and interruptions which would only serve to confuse the transcript these have been edited out

The following conventions have been used in transcription

(adapted from Graddol *et al.*, (1987) p.174.)

- Punctuation marks are used to create clarity of meaning on the page, which are indicated by pause or intonation on the tape

The following typographical features have been used:

- { } words not related to the study, for example, comments made by or to other students
- ( ) Indecipherable words indicated in the text by empty brackets
- (old) Indecipherable word with guessed suggestion indicated by the text

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix 8.

- [um] Non-verbal sounds
- blood underlined word indicates strong emphasis suggested by tone of voice.
- Direct quotations from the tapes are in inverted commas. Single commas indicate where the student reads the words directly from the text. For example [D4, 11-13]
  - 11 'What kind of'
  - 12 Judge Dredd looking at a cook
  - 13 'What kind of soup are you making pal'
- In order to understand the comments made by the readers in relation to the text each frame has been numbered.<sup>7</sup>

Categories were developed from the types of responses. These categories resulted from the frequency and range in which they appeared in the responses and were descriptive of the responses rather than being imposed prescriptively. The recorded data was initially analysed into the following categories and colour-coded.

These were:

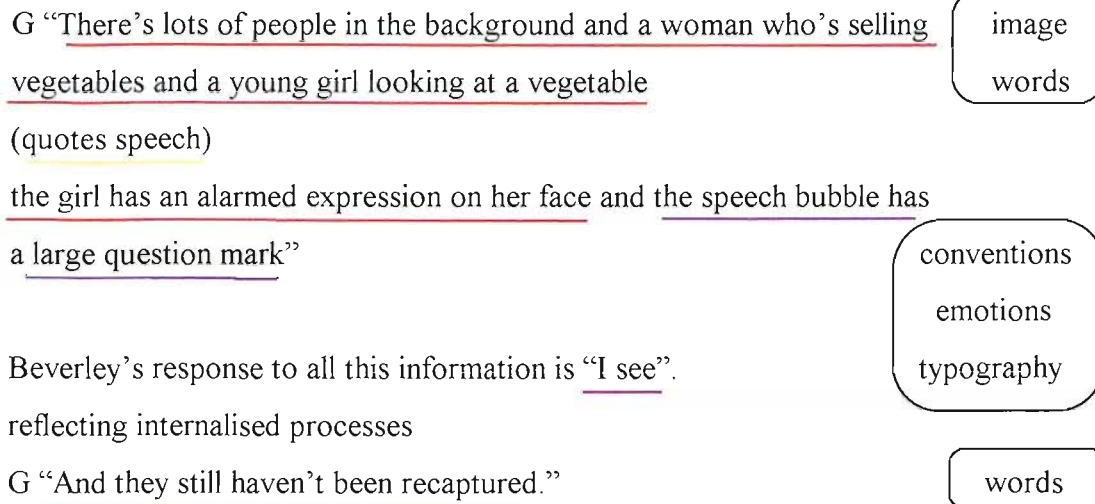
- references to the written text - linguistic signifiers (yellow)
- references to the images - iconic signifiers (orange)
- references to the textual conventions of the comic, for example the use of lines and speech bubbles (blue)
- references to opinion and supposition from the above information and identifying retrospection, inference, interpretation and evaluation. These were used to judge the quality and comprehension of the responses (purple)

All of the above references could appear in one statement as the reader collated the information mentally before recording it in speech. As one example we can see this process in [B7, 26-32]. Here Gina describes the different planes of the picture, quotes the words, infers the emotion of the girl from the non-verbal information, mentions the speech bubble, and the typography of the question mark, and infers from all this that the men will be a threat to the children.

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix 2

Figure 6.3 An example of colour coding a reading



Without access to the primary responses of the reader it is difficult to ascertain which information was processed initially and in what order. For example did Gina read the words before she described the scene? Had she already made assumptions about cause and effect before she selected details from the frames to describe to Beverley, and therefore left out what might be irrelevant to her own reading of the text? As Barthes concluded when discussing denotative and connotative levels, they can appear simultaneously, or almost so, even if logically one could assume that the denotative level came before the connotative.

In order to show what the analysis looked like with the colour coding and linking lines a sample is shown below. Some of the annotations have also been included and are printed in script.

Figure 6.4 An example of a reading with colour coding, mapping lines and comments:

Mark and Ben [D4, 1-17] (Appendix 6)

			frame
1. <u>Street rubbish</u>	sets scene		1
2. <u>Next frame a bug looking at us</u>	p.o.v. bug		2
3. <u>cockroach going towards others as if trouble</u>	text read cockroach		5/3
4. <u>Violence</u>	inference atmosphere		4/6
5. <u>The title frame. The Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach aged thirteen and a half</u>			7
6. <u>Judge Dredd walking through door with big crash</u>	assumes knowledge	word/image	6
7. <u>Two people behind look like bouncers with bow ties</u>	inference dress code		6
8. <u>I get this</u>		critical point	
9. <u>He puts fingers on table and lifts liquid</u>	inference from image		7
10. <u>Stuff on it</u>	word/image	visual/words	8
11. <u>What kind of</u>	word/image	stop frame	9
12. <u>Judge Dredd looking at a cook</u>	pov narrative		9
13. <u>What kind of soup are you making Pal - dandruff</u>	direct quote		9
14. <u>Get a hat on (in American accent)</u>			9
15. <u>Obviously dandruff going in soup</u>	inference words/images		9
16. <u>These guys aren't bouncers - they're waiters</u>	re-adjusts connotation		6
17. <u>stuff behind doors</u>	word and image		6

colour coding key:

blue - reference to comic devices

yellow - reading written text

orange - describing images

purple - inferences made from text or image

The analysis of the texts was based on the categories that were discussed in the comic language section. The categories into which the responses were collected related to both the iconic and linguistic signifiers. These were analysed according to the references made to the specific coding but with the comic signifiers the signs do not wholly fall into one or other category.



The responses were assessed in the depiction or iconic mode statements where there was implicit resemblance between the symbol and its referent as in the sound ‘CRASH’. Here inferences were made from observation of the image. The description code, abstracted from its referent and therefore arbitrary, was assessed through comments based on the inferences made about the narrative from the text. In the example above the purple lines indicate inferences made from the combination of codes and the gradual development of understanding by the reader. The ‘blind’ partner may well have been confused as the reader (Ben) does not make an explicit verbal connection between the narrative threads, although he has internalised the link between ‘stuff’ cockroaches and Judge Dredd inspecting the kitchen [8]. This lack of an explicit link leaves his partner unable to contribute effectively to any discussion.

When this reading is compared with Beverley and Gina’s discussion on the same text you can see how the A level students are able to externalise their thought processes more effectively, even though the narrative they are re-creating is not significantly different in its basic form. The extract below comes from the discussion that followed Gina’s detailed reading of the text for her partner; there are no mapping lines. The completeness of the reading enabled Beverley as the ‘blind’ partner to make the narrative link between the cockroaches, the dirty kitchen and Judge Dredd as health inspector. It also enabled understanding of the switch of narrative voice from the insect’s point of view to a third person. It was Gina as reader who inserted into the discussion comments to support and help Beverley’s thinking. It was also Gina who ensured that the essential link between the cockroach story and Judge Dredd was confirmed [83-5]. Both partners were able to take part in the inference process and the quality of their discussion reveals this. Whereas Ben was dominated by the character of Judge Dredd and the iconic mode, the two girls entered into the satirical tone that they had encountered within the linguistic code. This can be judged from such comments as the following:

[D7 90-1]

“yeh weird, you can tell it’s futuristic . . . comforting to know you’ll have cockroaches in the future”

*Figure 6.5 Beverley and Gina [pair7, 75-97] Appendix 6*

75. B I'm not sure that the first page is linked to the second part, insects  
 76. telling stories but after gets through the diary, obviously someone who  
 77. is doing a health inspection in a restaurant, which is obviously not  
 78. clean  
 79. Obviously a menacing again a figure of authority  
 80. G I forgot to describe it I said he had a headpiece, but his eyes are also  
 81. covered  
 82. B Ah so he's obviously a sinister figure of authority yes  
 83. G I believe that the two little stories are linked  
 84. It's an amusing tactic that these comics use, because the cockroach is  
 85. obviously living on all the dirt in the kitchen isn't it  
 86. B Ah yes, so cos it says . . . good mess on the floor  
 87. G It set in the future isn't it, so that's why because I was confused by  
 88. the, they're quite smart dinner jackets, but they are all padded  
 89. aren't they?  
 90. B yeh weird, you can tell it's futuristic. . . comforting to know you'll  
 91. have cockroaches in the future  
 92. G So we can tell that is Judge Dredd and futuristic and works there  
 93. He looks like a waiter, it's the bow tie and dinner jacket  
 94. and he's got a chef's outfit on that's a stereotypical chef's outfit  
 95. isn't it The jacket and the white hat  
 96. And the way he looks bigger than everyone, towering over them figure of  
 97. authority, big shoulder pads

The responses were categorised into the inferences (made from information and based in the factual evidence of the text) and evaluations (about the meanings created by the text for the reader) that appeared to be constructed from the information provided by the text. Above we have narrative structure and narrative voice [75-6; 83-5]; character constructed through dress and angle [79-82; 96-7]; time [87; 90-2]

place [75-8]; cultural knowledge to assess time/place and roles through dress codes [88-9; 93-96]; evaluation [84; 90-1].

These responses are the external recording of internalised thought processes. As can be seen in the examples above, they are limited by the ability of the reader to verbalise their thought processes and for the researcher to interpret the “fleeting images, half-formed notions, inadequately articulated meanings...” (Benton *et al* 1988) which sometimes appeared on the tapes. Introspective recall research does help to explain the inaccessibility of the information which is based upon internalised thought with the distortion that may develop in trying to make these explicit. “Much research tends to value the tidily explained above the dimly apprehended. Yet, in order to study the processes of reader response, we must inevitably work with uncertain data.” (ibid. p. 26)

There has to be an assumption made that even if it had been possible to observe introspection, there would not be significant differences in the *comparative* evidence which has been recorded between the pairs. It is in this comparison that the most interesting patterns emerged.

Obviously the more verbal evidence that is recorded, the more it is possible to get closer to the thought processes, or the introspective recall, of the readers. It is then possible to observe the half-formed ideas, the potential inferences and the reconstructed meanings. Where such evidence is limited to monosyllabic words or brief, apparently unrelated phrases, as in the recordings of the LSS students, other factors become paramount. The teacher-researcher becomes central to the process of analysis and interpretation of the tapes using their knowledge of the students and observation of them during the activity. I had worked with the students for nearly an academic year during the pilot study and had observed the recordings being made. I therefore felt able to interpret the inflections in voice more nearly to the students' meanings. This may not have been possible by external analysis with the minimal material available.

Although the tapes have been fully transcribed only the relevant parts of the recording are included in the transcripts. As has been stated, the emphasis was on trying to observe how readers approached this type of text by providing as natural a context as possible within the confines of a classroom, the restrictions of timetables and syllabuses. The recordings were done in normal classroom situations and class time, and therefore include a certain amount of extraneous material, such as other student comments and external interruptions.

## **The Texts**

The recordings were based upon discussions of single or double page spreads. None of these was a complete narrative. This meant that the participants had to construct meaning from extracts by using the textual evidence provided by words, images and comic devices. To do this they had to make suppositions as to the type of story, the characters, the action and the settings. It was felt that this would lead to more externalised ‘inferential walks’ as the readers were forced to discuss the possibilities opened by only having partial information. It would provoke discussion rather than invoke description. This would give more data on which to work<sup>8</sup>.

The diversity of texts meant that not each of the texts was read by each pair. It would have been invidious to have presented texts to the LSS students which were too difficult for them to discuss. Conversely, only easy texts would not have provided enough challenge to the A Level students to reveal their understanding at a more complex level.

The texts were graded by content and by sophistication of visual language. This was partly a subjective process judged on style and content rather than on a readability formula, such as the Fog Index. The 1973 study which had used cloze procedure had shown some of the difficulties in trying to quantify the language of the comic form. One example was in trying to assess what or what was not a word. The added

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<sup>8</sup> Texts are in Appendix 2

complication of images as part of the meaning structure would have made this type of formula inappropriate. Even with a simple written text where length of sentence and number of syllables can be readily judged, there are inherent difficulties with these types of formulae. The second factor, more relevant to this study, was that the quality of the responses from individual readers was not necessarily related to conceptual problems or the level of difficulty of the text, but sometimes had more to do with “personal experience, knowledge and motivation” (Graddol et al 1987, p. 213). Amongst examples of these I will be discussing the GCSE pair who could make no sense of *Judge Dredd* and the A level pair who had difficulties with the *Famous Five* story.

During the pilot studies the level of each of the texts was assessed by using alternative pages from the same texts with other groups. One way of confirming the order of difficulty or ‘readability’ of the texts was to look at the ratio of opinion or supposition statements to the words and pictures. Here the statements were counted and categorised according to whether they were either wholly or in the main from the image or the words. Inferential statements made from the information provided by the words and pictures were also counted. The ratio shows how the images/words statements relate numerically to the inference statements. It is assumed that the more complex and sophisticated the text the more it will lend itself to readers making inferential statements.

*Figure 6.6 Ratio of opinion to pictures/words*

Text A	1:0
Text B	1:1.76
Text C	1:2.00
Text D	1:2.14

The ratios are indicative of the increased use of supposition and inference when reading the texts. This indicates the relative differences between the texts related to

the more ambiguous nature and difficulty of some of the texts. It therefore provides supporting evidence for the order of reading difficulty of the texts within this study.

The four texts chosen, although in one sense arbitrary as the choice could have been made from thousands of possible pages, did fulfil certain criteria:

- They provided a range of topic, genre, style and form
- They were of varying levels of difficulty
- They also had significant elements in the way the stories were told, for example: the use of parallel narratives; various complex narrator/ee positions; location changes; stylistic differences in the design
- Two used children as the main protagonists, two used anthropomorphic characters, and one used a super-hero. These are all conventions of the comic form

The aim was to have a range of texts that would necessitate different strategies, but would also be accessible to a wide range of interests, knowledge and reading ability.

## Text A

*Going West* by Martin Waddell and Philippe Dupasquier.<sup>9</sup> This first text comes from a story about settlers moving into the West in the USA. The narrator is one of the children on the wagon train. There is also the position of omniscient point of view through the images showing the narrator in the frame. This story has a clear, simple graphic style and a clear narrative form following the journey of the wagon train. It is a fictional story but based upon the social history of the settlers who travelled west across America in the nineteenth century. Its style is more static and less dynamic than the other texts. It also has fewer comic conventions. This text was chosen because it had a more formal structure of narrative, and a more controlled vocabulary as well as being more accessible in drawing style. The cloze research had shown that readers with a low level of reading skills are more able to reconstruct a text where the sentence structure is more formal, and the organisation linear in design with

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<sup>9</sup> Dupasquier is a well known illustrator and is referred to in the discussion on picture books

smaller elliptical leaps. It also provided a recognisable genre familiar to all levels of readers.

In the extract selected there is one frame across the top of a double page spread showing the wagon train crossing a swollen river. Smaller frames below and to the side represent the people being washed away and then a camp fire with the survivors. There is no text within the frames. The text to the left side explains the visuals and carries on the story of the sick child.

## Text B

The second text chosen was *The Famous Five and the Golden Galleon*. This was originally published in graphic novel form on the Continent as *Les Cinq et le galleon d'or* by Claude Voilier. The genre of children encountering adventures is traditional in children's literature and the *Famous Five* stories by Enid Blyton are a well known children's adventure genre. The comments in the transcripts may indicate that some students might have been unaware of the *Famous Five* stories. The story is told in a classic narrative form with the narrator external to the story, but with the images developing other narrative positions within the diegesis. The style of this story is more dynamic than *Going West* with lots of frames giving rapid movement. Speech bubbles develop the narrative and allow internal thoughts to be read. This contrasts with the 'voice over' narrator style that is characteristic of the *Going West* story.

This text was chosen because it was felt to be a well-known type of story so that the form would also be familiar. The drawings are 'realistic', that is they have line representations of people, and objects are placed in the frames to locate space and add reality into the *mise en frame*. It has a classic time/space continuum but with the added aspect of parallel narratives as well as a switch in location. The character roles of heroes and villains are easily identified. It has the distinctive comic book style of frames, speech bubbles and lines.

The extract shown is of the children, the Famous Five, discovering treasure hidden by robbers in a tomb in the graveyard of a ruined church. In a parallel narrative, shown subsequently on the page, we see one of the children, Ann. She has left the others to buy provisions in a market and she overhears a conversation about the escaped gangsters. In design there are seven irregular shaped frames, set out horizontally as two, two and three. In addition to speech bubbles there is the use of punctuation marks to indicate emotion. There is one written information link 'in Kirrin village'. This transfers us through a time/space ellipsis from one narrative setting to the parallel one.

### Text C

The third text, *Canardo, Private Eye. A Shabby Dog Story* by Sokal, is a more sophisticated story, both in content and style, than the previous two texts. This was originally published in Belgium as *Le Chien Debout*. It comes from the continental tradition of graphic novel. It is written in the style of a Forties *film noir*/gangster story, but with the more contemporary theme of experimentation on animals. Most of the characters are anthropomorphic. The hero is a dog looking for the killer of his sweetheart. There is an ironic twist in the tail of the story in that it was his action at the beginning of the story which actually caused her death. It has a particularly filmic quality in the framing. For example the first pages consist of a full page establishing shot followed by a series of wide frames in low angle, close-up of a car approaching a carot left on a road.

The double page spread chosen for the reading shows Canardo, the dog, attempting to enter the evil doctor's house where he will discover that the doctor has been experimenting on animals. It has a more complicated layout than texts A and B, with both horizontal and vertical references. It generally works from left to right with a combination of large and small frames of varying dimensions. There are speech bubbles, neologisms and punctuation marks, with a time ellipsis link in the words, 'a little later'. The narrative point of view moves between subjective, objective and



omniscient, sometimes within one frame, it therefore demands more advanced reading skills. Its topic also draws on more adult themes and cultural references.

## Text D

The fourth text is by far the most complex in terms of narrative structure. It is based upon the super-hero character, Judge Dredd. It also references the satirical novels based around the teenage character of Adrian Mole<sup>10</sup>. In this comic story the narrator is a cockroach and the story is entitled *The Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach aged 13½months*. Judge Dredd, as the law enforcer is inspecting the kitchen in which the cockroach lives. He finds the kitchens unacceptable and he orders their fumigation and the disposal of the workers. Only the cockroach Adrian, survives the cleansing process. The Judge Dredd character has been very successful in comic form and has recently been the subject of a film starring Sylvester Stallone.<sup>11</sup> The Adrian Mole character has also appeared in other media forms such as radio and television. It is perfectly possible to read the story without understanding these intertextual references, but the titles give an added sub-text based upon knowledge of the stories of Judge Dredd and of the teenage diarist Adrian Mole.

The layout of the narrative is in a series of frames that are less structured on a left to right convention than the other texts. It is therefore more difficult to re-construct the narrative from frame order. The reading of the students illustrated that they began to move across the wide-angled top frame but then would move downward to the title frame. Mark and Ben [D4, 1-3] are an example of this:

Figure 6.7 Reference to frames in Judge Dredd [D4]

B “street rubbish	Frame 1
next frame a bug looking at us	Frame 2
cockroach	Frame 5
going towards others as if trouble”	Frame 3

<sup>10</sup> See for example, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13½* (1982) by Sue Townsend, Methuen

<sup>11</sup> *Judge Dredd* (1995)

The choice of this text was based upon its graphic style and the main character. It was thought that Dredd would be familiar through intertextuality, even if the student had not read the comics in which the Judge Dredd stories appeared.<sup>12</sup> It is a single narrative with two protagonists. It has a highly elliptical style with the cockroach as narrator surrounding the Dredd story. It requires more observation and reconstruction from the readers. The two interconnected stories are signalled by the two title frames - Judge Dredd [10] at the bottom and Adrian Cockroach [5] to the right hand side. It uses the comic conventions of speech bubbles, neologisms and information boxes such as, 'The gang were already up and about ...' It uses more sophisticated techniques, such as changes in typography, as well as irony and narrator identification.

## Discussion

The purpose of this research is to find out how the readers have used the various languages and comic conventions to construct and to understand the narrative. The counting of references, such as particular codes, did reveal quantitative data on usage and complemented the reading analysis, but it was the detailed analysis of the readings that provided more interesting and insightful data from which conclusions could be drawn as to how the readers were using various processes. For this purpose it was not only the actual reading of words, the listing of iconic elements or direct reference to the texts that was important, but more significantly the discussions and asides which were made in each of the recordings.

In the design of this case study research it was hoped to be able to observe the understanding of each text through description and discussion taking place between the participants. In many ways this was an artificial exercise in that the students were asked to do something which they would normally not have done. Adults read pictures and stories to children, but reading texts and particularly comics aloud between teenagers is not a usual social activity. Additionally the texts used may not

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<sup>12</sup> Judge Dredd stories appear in *2000AD*

have been ones which the students themselves would have chosen to read. It was hoped that this very artificiality would encourage the participants to bring to the surface their thought and reading processes. As individual readings are positioned in this analysis there is incremental development of the whole picture of reading comics. Individual elements may become dislodged or misplaced in this building process but knowledge is always cumulative, even with negative results.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the readers and the texts as well as the research methods and tools employed. The next chapter interprets and analyses the recorded evidence. In the analysis I have integrated the characteristics of the comic analysed in Chapter 4 with the data produced by the taped readings of the texts discussed here and in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 7

# Field Research Report

### Introduction

In Chapter 5 the methodological issues were discussed and in Chapter 6 the final design of the research was described. In this chapter the transcripts from the field research are analysed.

In summary the field research consisted of four extracts and nine pairs of students (eighteen participants) who between them discussed nineteen texts. The aim was to have at least two different texts read by two different pairs in each of the three ability groups, with an overlap between each group on at least one text (see Figure 6.1). This provided comparative data across pairs as well as the individual readings. This meant that certain quantifiable as well as qualitative assessments could be made from the analysis of the transcripts. The relative data showed certain patterns of responses such as the type and number of references to images and texts. But it was in the descriptions and discussions which arose through individual textual readings that the actual reading process appeared more transparent and where insights into how readers read comics could be more easily ascertained.

In the discussion of the transcripts conventions for identification have already been described, but it may be useful to recap. To locate the participants to whom the comment and analysis refers the letter attached to each text and the number to each pair is used. (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2) Each line is numbered as it appears in the transcript.<sup>1</sup> These line numbers are given after the text and pair reference. For example [B7, 23-24] would indicate Beverley and Gina [pair 7] from the A Level cohort [Pairs 7,8 and 9] talking about the *Famous Five* story [text B] and reference lines 23 and 24 in the transcripts.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcripts can be found in Appendix 6

*Figure 7.1 Summary of coding*

text	pair	lines
B	7	23-4

As was stated in the previous chapter the responses have been analysed by the references made to the written text, the iconic signifiers, the conventions of the comic, and narrative references external to text but showing retrospection and inference. This was done on the transcripts by colour-coding and by marginal annotation. The effect of colour-coding meant that patterns of responses could be seen for each set of readings and any pattern across readings could be picked out visually. The annotations provided data for a more individual detailed analysis. (Figures 6.3 and 6.4)

## Images and Words

The responses were transferred into a quantifiable form to give a comparison across texts and readers, (Figures 7.2 and 7.3) but although this type of quantifiable data can throw up overall patterns, as the data is from a very limited sample it can only be regarded as a means of revealing possible interesting areas for future investigation rather than as a definitive result. For example:

*Figure 7.2 A comparison across four texts.*

Number of opinion statements related to (a) pictures and (b) words

	opinion/pictures	opinion/words
Text A	14	0
Text B	30	17
Text C	16	8
Text D	30	12

As can be seen from this table:

- the pictures gave more opportunity for opinions to be expressed. In most cases it was approximately 50%
- the more open nature of the pictures and their potential to let the reader interpret, rather than to inform, meant that they were more flexible and therefore more likely to be deconstructed within an interpretative framework.
- the opinion level was related to the more ambiguous nature or complexity of the narrative structure. Both text B and D had two inter-related narratives, whilst texts A and C had only a single narrative.
- The greater sophistication of the readers of texts B, C and D may have increased the number of opinion statements connected with the words.

Words in the study texts have various functions. All the following examples are taken from *The Famous Five* page:

- They tend to give direct information, such as time of day or place, such as ‘In Kirrin Village’ and are therefore less open to opinion or supposition statements.
- They also tend to confirm inferences already made by images, such as, “It is! It’s the treasure from the Golden Galleon.”
- They are often essential for understanding cause and effect in the narrative. In text B the rapid exit from the market (effect) is given a cause in the speech bubble “I must warn the others quick! They might walk right into those men.” This also establishes the next enigma for the narrative - will they?
- Therefore the linguistic meaning system most frequently provided what Barthes would call the primary codes, that is the hermeneutic and proairetic codes, whereas the comments related to the pictures were often associated with Barthes’ secondary codes, that is the semic, the cultural and the symbolic codes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> see Barthes *S/Z* (1975)

## Comic Conventions

The knowledge of comic conventions was one of the frameworks in which the readers approached this form. All the participants had filled in a questionnaire which showed that they had been comic readers even if they claimed not to read them currently. This was supplemented with discussion with the LSS students to ensure that they understood the basic terminology such as frames and speech bubbles.

*Figure 7.3 References to comic conventions:<sup>3</sup>*

LSS	2*
GCSE	19
A Level	86

\* This result is skewed by the type of format of text A, but in other readings done during the pilot study there was a similar low level of direct reference

*Figure 7.4 References made to comic conventions by type*

frames	55
layout	16
typography	11
sound	9
speech bubbles	9
lines indicating action/speed	6
point of view	1

- The framing device provided the most important functional key to the structure of the narratives
- In all cases the A Level students made more references to the structure of the texts and the LSS students made the least comment

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<sup>3</sup> The comic conventions specified in this study are discussed earlier

- Most of the comments with reference to the comic conventions from the GCSE group related to the layout and to the framing
- Students referred to comic conventions such as speed lines. That is they read the icon and the determinative to read the 'ideogram'
- Speech and thought bubbles were acknowledged at all levels, if indirectly

## Narrative Structuring

In general the A level pairs' greater use of the structure and conventions of the form provided them with more sophisticated analytical parameters in which to discuss the texts, although there were some significant differences even within the same levels.

On the other hand LSS students did not formalise comments on structure. In addition their responses were descriptive of the action within the frame and they often did not infer a link between frames. This tendency to work within discrete frames apparently hampered their understanding of the narrative.

Only one student tried to summarise the narrative before describing it in frame-by-frame detail. This was a GCSE student, who said [B6, 1-2]

D 1 "I'll tell you first

2 The whole story is about kids, teenagers playing."

This initially appeared to be an attempt at trying to provide his partner with some sort of framework for understanding the text; but in fact it was not given as part of an overview of the narrative but an assessment of the images which without reference to the written text suggested young people 'playing'. The final comment revealed that understanding of the narrative, that is the critical point where the reader is able to make sense of the narrative,<sup>4</sup> came at the end not the beginning of the exercise for this particular reader.

[B6, 12 "Oh it's about prison escape"]

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of a critical point is discussed more fully in the next chapter



No other student appeared to attempt this initial overview technique for the narrative structure, although there were general comments which indicated that there had been an overall initial scan of the text by the reading member of the pair. For example: [C9, 1] “This looks extremely funny” and four lines further on the same speaker states after some thought, [C9, 5] “It looks like one of those spooky ghost stories.”

In most cases the description was a frame-by-frame approach even if there had been an initial scan across the pages. So Gina attempts to give her partner an overall feel of the layout with [C7, 2] “I’m looking at ... the first page consists of six frames” but not the genre or any other narrative information. The reader then appeared to give a frame-by-frame attack referring backwards to previous frames (anaphoric comments) as points became clearer with reference to the frame currently under scrutiny:

[C7, 31] “so that supports that he’s running then OK”,  
which refers back to the comment made earlier, where the icon and the determinative had been read.

[C7, 22] “so it looks as though he’s running.”

This has been a general summary of the readings with some comparative comments. The following is a detailed analysis of the transcripts done in order of text. The analysis attempts to integrate the textual references with the processes revealed by the speakers to consider if there is a link between the various literacies within the comic form. Kress and van Leeuwen claim that “there is a close similarity between *sequential* information structure in language and *horizontal* structure in visual composition and this attests to the existence of deeper, more abstract coding orientation which find their expression differently in different semiotic codes.” (1996, p. 188) Is there also a parallel similarity in the process of decoding these codes?

## Analysis of Reading by Texts<sup>5</sup>

### *Text A Going West*

This story follows a wagon train as they move west. In the written text it is told from the perspective of a girl on the wagon train, “We crossed the river.” But in the visuals we see her as one of the characters within the frame, therefore from a third person, objective perspective. So in effect the text is like a voice over to the visuals. The extract chosen was where the wagon train was trying to cross a swollen river. The visuals are quite explicit with a wide frame of the scene and then close ups of the action in the river. The final frame shows a time/space cut with the survivors huddled around a camp fire in the evening. This text was only given to the LSS students. The students had low reading ages, but they were able to read at Reading Ages between 7-11 years.

These students’ discussions were characterised by an emphasis on the pictures rather than the words,

[A1, 1] “You can tell using picture rather than words.” And in the main they used the pictures to try to re-construct the story. Their lack of reading fluency apparently led them to avoid reading the written text:

[A1, 5-6] “No I just looked at the picture  
Easier to work with pictures”

When encouraged they could decipher the words, even so it was still apparent that reading the words was not encouraging the students to reach a critical point in their understanding of the text.

They did not refer voluntarily to specific aspects of the comic such as the frame or other conventions. But when asked which frame in the *Going West* page they would read first, they said,

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<sup>5</sup> A layout and description of each frame is found in appendix 2 with colour photocopies of extracts

[A3, 34-5] “Well I would read the big one first because it’s, because it’s big and it’s more illustrated.”

The limited understanding of cause and effect could be seen in the plenary conversations with these students. Although they had basic understanding it had to be teased out and directed with questions. When I asked what had happened to make the river swollen there was initially no response, but after prompting by pointing out specific objects within the frame such as the broken planks, there was more response:

[A1, 7-12] “probably the dam was broken ...  
a bridge there probably collapsed ...  
windy as well ...  
might be windy ...”

This absence of initial unprompted response could possibly be put down to other factors than lack of understanding, including lack of interest, inability to concentrate, or insecurity in providing responses in case they were wrong. Although I had hoped to overcome this type of difficulty by working with these students over a period of time it might still have been an influencing factor. The paired conversation had provided limited material which is reflected in the data collected. But the subsequent longer discussions did provide some evidence of understanding with Carrie stating that the boy “ falls off the horse, then, then he’s (referring to the man in the frame) jumped out to rescue him . . . going to keep themselves warm . . . the boy and the bloke who saved the boy.” [A1, 14-17] These responses did indicate an understanding of cause and effect, in terms of human action.

When the students were left to discuss the page without prompting there was limited response and often these were related to personal experience prompted by the pictures, but not actually referred to in the text (exophoric references).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>see Halliday and Hasan (1976)

## Summary

The work during the 1989 study and the pilot had already forewarned that responses from these students would be directed outside the text to personal experience. For example in another extract given during the pilot there is a desert indicated by the skulls of cattle in the foreground through which the wagon train is moving. The students made no reference to the setting indicated by the *mise en frame* (endophora) but did identify the wagon train. Having established this the conversation moved from wagon trains of the nineteenth century to twentieth century caravans with this statement:

“gypsy only have caravans they’ve stolen”

This move into a personal story at a tangent from the actual narrative was characteristic of the type of discussions these students had both during the pilot and the final research. The comment, [B2, 6] “it’s really easy to get out of jail” is another example, as is the statement made during the pilot studies “(.....) went to the Falklands,” when looking at an aeroplane in a comic. This latter comment was related to the fact that a relative of this student had fought in the Falklands War.

- Students at this level relied heavily upon the images for meaning
- The level of inference and evaluation was minimal
- There was a strong preference to link action on the page with concrete personal experience rather than with the fictional, and to them abstract, story
- There was a limited response to the narrative form unless prompted. The semantic and grammatical intra-textual relationship with references forward (cataphoric) and backward (anaphoric) were not evident
- There was use of textual reference (endophoric) [A1] “then he’s jumped out to rescue them”

*Text B The Famous Five and The Golden Galleon*

This page shows the three children and the dog opening a tomb in a ruined church to reveal the stolen ingots. Parallel to this action and appearing half way down the page another girl is in Kirrin village buying food in the market. Here she overhears a conversation between two women about the escape of the robbers who are after the gold. She then hurries off to warn her friends.

**A level students**

The analysis of these students' responses can be summarised into three areas: references to the comic language, references to the narrative structure, and cues and miscues.

The A level pairs are familiar with the conventions of the comic and directly mention the use of such things as speech bubbles and speed lines as well as making indirect reference to them:

[B7, 33-34] "and there's some lines like in a cartoon yes speed ones."

[B7, 63-5] "So that's why she's hurrying, and you can tell she's hurrying ... like you say and those speed lines going along and the bike."

[B8, 94] "now we've got all these lines going past which creates urgency and also the speech bubbles."

[B7, 37] "... and a speech bubble, 'I must warn the others' ..."

[B8, 87-8] "and she says, 'I must warn the others quick, they may walk into the others' hands' and she's thinking that."

These students had little difficulty in reading either the iconic or linguistic codes as independent systems to reconstruct possible narratives. In this text there are two narratives happening simultaneously (parallel narratives). One is the action in the churchyard with the discovery of the gold, and the other is the conversation about the escaped convicts overheard in the market. Where the evidence in the pictures is unclear these students use the written text to help them to limit narrative options.

They move easily between both codes to find evidence to support their suppositions, although are sometimes confused by miscuing.

Here is one example illustrating this movement.

*Figure 7.5 movement between text and image*

[B8,93-4] “and then she thinks ‘I must warn the others’	<i>comic/words</i>
now we’ve got all these lines going past which creates urgency”	<i>comic/icon</i>
and secondly:	<i>determinative</i>
[B7,16-18] “You can see what it is in the tomb bars of	
something in sacks”.	<i>icon</i>
Then they read the speech bubble:	<i>comic/words</i>
“It’s the treasure from the Golden Galleon”	
and conclude,	
“So it’s the treasure.”	<i>conditional</i>
	<i>inference</i>

Although all the clues for understanding this extract and for making possible narrative assumptions are within the written text, intertextual knowledge is important in understanding this extract for these readers. Pair 7 obviously realise this is a *Famous Five* narrative,

[B7, 38-9] “I’ve got a good idea what the narrative is here then  
It was the Famous Five ...”

but are confused by the number of characters in the first part of the page,

[B7, 19-21] “ ‘Hurray the five have done it’ ”

The five but there’s only three and a dog there

Yes there’s two missing.”

until they read the parallel story in the market place - and the mathematics works out:

[B7, 39-41] “It was the Famous Five, but then I was confused because there was one character missing, but then at the end there was this girl who was at the veg stall is that other character.” This conversation reveals how the students have used

cognitive frameworks to arrive at an understanding through the use of inference from words and image, but have also used various knowledges, such as the genre and the particular literary tradition from which this text derives. That is they accessed and used information outside of the specific text to help them to understand the narrative.

The conversation by Ben and Martin (pair 8), revealed that they have not realised the literary connection and are therefore even more confused by the reference to the number five:

[B8, 42-43] “and the other goes, ‘hooray the Five have done it again’ even though there’s only four of them and that’s including the dog”

In order to explain this they suggest possible plot options, [B8, 44] “but there could be others that died before, or not died but got left behind”.

This effectively shows how in analysing the role of the reader the analysis must “take into account that the perceived structures will be different for different readers, depending on what knowledge schemas are triggered and what their content might be” (Graddol *et al*, 1987, p. 203)

One of the knowledge schemas is how narratives can move through time and space. The specific nature of this page with its split in location means that it is essential that the readers understand the time and space manipulation of the narrative. All three pairs are confused about the location. The semiotic clues in the images are apparently misleading them as are the words. Pair 7 say:

[B7, 42-46] “They are in some kind of foreign country

... Kirrin village

I don’t know it’s hard to tell

That looks foreign, but then this doesn’t look like ancient Greece or Egyptian or anything. They are in foreign dress.”

Pair 8 are just as confused about the location, and also suggest that it is set in a foreign country. In order to make sense of this confusion of setting, this pair decide to use another device which illustrates their skills in reading texts, they recap;

[B8,11] “Right so we are seeing a whole area of jungle” and [B8, 33-34] “You can see more ruins and rubble around now, you can definitely see more like old Egyptian, or something like that” These iconic references to ruins and the tomb [B8,35] are used to “symbolise how old.”

The name Kirrin cottage and the ‘ancient’ setting are the elements which set both pairs off on this discussion. The third pair [9] locate the story in France because of what they describe as the gothic nature of the architecture: [B9, 10] “It looks like a French town very Gothic” Interestingly these students had perhaps been sensitive enough to respond to the style of buildings in the illustrations which were supposed to be set in England, but were drawn by a French artist.

In these readings it was the iconic clues, cultural knowledge, and their understanding of symbols to represent ideas, which helped to create meaning. The lack of an establishing clue, either verbal or visual, and the unusual nature of the constructed name Kirrin, with perhaps the ambiguity in the drawings meant that the pairs could not establish a framework or access accurately previous knowledges of locations. But unlike the LSS students who had been unable to use the skull metaphor to indicate the desert conditions and implied fate of the wagon train, the A Level students were able to use their knowledge of symbolic codes. For example, the knowledge that ivy can be used to symbolise ‘ancient’ was the basis for their suppositions about setting, and they worked through a range of possible locations from clues such as these:

[B7, 51-52] “You can see here it’s ancient because of the decoration and the ivy. Because ivy suggests old stuff.

And the brick because it’s all crumbling”

[B8, 4-5] “it looks like old building, there’s a pillar that’s broken suggests it might be old” and further on in their discussion [B8, 33-35] they concluded with “symbolise how old”.

The reading given by pair 8 reveals the miscues which lead them along unhelpful paths. For example, where the girl rushes from the market, they conclude that she has taken something from the old lady, [B8, 86] “on her bike and she’s obviously



snatched something from the old lady's hand." This reading comes from the drawn lines which do indicate that the girl has rapidly left the frame, but the "something" (potatoes) are in fact being served to another character in the frame.

Pair 8 also miscue in the linguistic code with the word 'ingot' which they read as 'Inca'. This combined with the visual signifiers of the vegetation, high point of view and [B8, 3] "this casket and a tomb or something", creates the framework of an exotic location which misguides them through their reading. This combination of errors, or miscued switching, means they have more difficulty in making their reconstructed narrative make sense. At one stage the stone tomb has suggested a possible Egyptian setting,

[B8, 27-34] "...they've jammed it in the top of this tomb trying to pull it open...Egyptian or something like that." Lack of knowledge and poor decoding has confused Inca - ingot - Egyptian.

Ben's confusion reflects Martin's misreadings, [B8, 59-65] "I thought you meant a jungle village ..." Martin "Oh no it's got modern buildings in the background". But they do use strategies to overcome these apparent anomalies. Martin tries to create a logic in the apparent lack of coherence for Ben by stating "cut a long way away" and then tries to help by moving away from the problem of location onto the characters, [B8, 80-1] "so 'cause we've lost the background and we focus on them now importance"

B "so where they are now is not important, but what they are saying is".

Ben and Martin, having struggled with understanding the setting, also struggle with the narrative form. They identify the cut to the second strand but do not see how to link the two stories.

[B8, 48 and 97] "then OK then we cut up somewhere else ... We're now in Kirrin village"

They conclude, that [B8, 93-98] "she thinks 'I must warn the others' ...sounds as if there is definitely some danger surrounding these men yeh

But we don't know why"

On the other hand, Gina and Beverley, who have made the inter-textual link to the *Famous Five*, re-construct the narrative expertly. They conclude that there is danger from the parallel story of the girl overhearing the conversation in the market place and link this with the discovery of the gold by the other children. The link and interaction between the linguistic and iconic code becomes obvious, [B17, 53-61] “OK then we found out that there’s been some danger because the girl found out ... ‘escaped gangsters arrested yesterday’ ... maybe they were hiding that treasure, they stole it in the first place, or they want to find it ... so these lot are in danger now because the convicts know where the treasure is hidden ...”

Pair 9, Jim and James, have a different style of conversation. They perform what is essentially a frame by frame description, giving for example, cultural references, [B9, 10-11] “It looks like a French town, very Gothic”, and they also build up from the action a narrative structure. Their conclusions are [B9, 33] “it sounds slightly weird, slightly out of place.” But they do identify the genre [B9,35-7] “...men in prison ...probably planning to do another job ...that’s about it.” This pair do not discuss the use of the comic conventions except to talk about ‘frames’, but they do suggest how they have used the iconic clues and the written text to suggest narrative, [B9, 32-3] “...sounds like some kind of crime thing ...possibly some sort of cops and robbers type of thing” [B9, 30] They also talk about the narrative structure, [B9, 26-8] “Almost as though it is cut in part the way through a film as though following a story line, so you get the establishing shot and then so go back into the story line.”

### **The GCSE students**

The GCSE cohort have more problems than the A level group in identifying that the two sequences on the page from the *Famous Five* story are linked in some way. All three pairs identify the fact that the location is in a graveyard, although one pair initially thinks the tomb is a boat.

[B6, 3-4] “They’re pushing a great big boat thing but it’s on land”

But they realise their mistake when they look at the setting

[B6, 5- 6] “I know what it is - it looks like a grave maybe in woods, because all leaves around.” They also realised from the words that there was treasure in the tomb,

[B6, 8] “treasure chest with treasure in it.”

Having looked at the market scene, they identify the question mark as being significant and then identify its meaning from the words in the frame:

[B6, 11-12] “women's got a question mark above so she's shocked  
Oh it's about a prison escape,”

Thus overtly linking words and pictures and from this making inferences about the type of story.

This latter group [6] were the pair who had established an overall scan of the page and summarised the action. It is obvious from the comments that although there are no direct quotations to the words they had been read,

[B6, 12] “Oh it’s about a prison escape.”

So like the A level students they link the graphic, the words and the iconic clues together to re-construct the possible narrative in each of the sequences. But these students do not make any intertextual reference to the *Famous Five*, and in fact they appear to ignore what becomes the central enigma to some of the A level pairs about the numbers of characters not adding up. This means that they have identified the two stories but apparently have not linked them. (That is they have stayed on the periphery in terms of the spiral model proposed later)

Pair 4, Mark and Ben having located the first story:

[B4, 5] “everyone’s smiling collecting gold”, are then confused by the switch to the other location

[B4, 6-7] “Busy market place”,

“Is this a totally different story?” The caesura created by this new setting is not explained with reference to the written text.

The reader leaves the words out of the description although refers to the fact that there is conversation:

[B4, 8-10] “Next picture Market place busy gossip

### Conversation women

Two women carry on talking,” and then reads aloud the written text at the end. But even then offers no explanation as to how the two stories inter-relate.

In the GCSE group it was also noticeable that most of the initial references were to the visual cues. In fact one pair made no attempt to read aloud the written text at all [B6] but had obviously read the words and had used the information in re-telling the story to their partner. This pair did interpret the information signified by the question mark even though not quite accurately,

[B6, 11] “woman’s got a question mark above so she’s shocked.”

Thus showing their understanding of the symbolic use of punctuation marks. They also made other references to the comic conventions such as the frames.

LSS students found the page from the *Famous Five* difficult to understand. As can be seen from Figure 6.1, text B was the one given to the full range of abilities and therefore provides the most comprehensive evidence in terms of comparative readings. The evidence from the LSS students is minimal and related to external comments such as: [B2, 1] “What’s happening in frame?” The one tangential comment was, [B2,6] “it’s really easy to get out of jail”, once it was pointed out that there was a jail escape happening. This was indicative of their style of response in using other texts. The LSS students avoided reading the linguistic codes:

(B1,5-6) “I just looked at the pictures

Easier to work with pictures”

It was necessary to read both the visual and written codes in order to make sense of this page, such as the link between the children opening the tomb and finding gold. This proved too complex, the narrative gaps too wide and much of the recorded conversation was not related to the page. Even ‘jogging’ questions put by the researcher failed to help provide more detailed responses.

Understanding of the narrative form is helped by inter-textual knowledge, such as of type or genre of story. This provides frameworks in which to try out propositions. The following extract from the conversation of pair 7 shows the way they establish the narrative:

[B7, 66-71] “If you’ve read the Famous Five you can work it out. It’s typical if you are familiar with the story. It’s typical Enid Blyton.

It’s just a matter of working out what relationship they’ve had with these gangsters, and why the little girl is worried.

Maybe they put the gangsters into prison in the first place, because they are always doing those things.”

Without certain key knowledges, miscueing can occur. Ben and Martin [8] appeared not to have this knowledge framework about the characters, or at least were not able to reference it in their reading. Also Ben and Martin miscued in understanding the word ‘ingot’. Given the visual clues which they thought suggested a jungle or exotic surroundings, they tried to make the link between this and the word ingot by understanding it as Inca.

[B8, 6-7] Ben is speaking, “and one geezer’s saying, ‘If Timmy’s right, the ingots’ I don’t know who the ingots are

(Martin interrupts) ingots are Indians

(Ben continues), the ingots are in this tomb”.

The fact that the number of characters involved being signalled in the written text was a clue to the story was seen as obviously important, ‘hurray the five have done it again’. But they did not understand the literary reference.

[B8, 2] “these three geezers and a dog”

But like Gina and Beverley they do understand the genre;

[B8, 18-19] It sounds like some sort of kid’s adventure, something like these three kids in a jungle looking for these Indians”

With a different style of reading, Jim and James [9] tried to establish the genre as a way into the narrative when they reached the discussion stage. [B9, 24-5] “sounds like some kind of crime thing, the first frame, and second scene ... goes into the action”. This method of approach was different from the other two A level pairs. They concentrated upon the description of the frames quite clearly and precisely during the first three quarters of their transcription [lines 1-22]. There is little

interpretation until the discussion [lines 23-37]. It appears to have been as effective a strategy for suggesting possible narrative areas as the other style.

By colour-coding the readings done by the three pairs in the A level group, it is possible to show the differences between pairs 7 and 8, and pair 9. Pair 9 directed the first half of their reading almost entirely to a detailed description and then made judgements from these. The other two ranged forward and backwards between direct references to the words, the pictures and opinions in a much more integrated fashion.

The GCSE pairs were able to establish the basic information of treasure in a tomb and the prison escape, but appeared not to make the connection between the two parallel stories, even though they were laid out on the same page. The inferential leap between the two proved elusive. The LSS students found the task too complex and responses were monosyllabic and minimal, although showed evidence of understanding single frames, such as, [B2, 12] “surprised” related to frame 6

## Summary

The importance of establishing the type of story in order to begin to interpret the specific narrative is seen in the discussions. Whereas text A is clearly a ‘western’, indicated through the iconic elements this text is more enigmatic. The students who successfully identified the genre were able to build up possible narratives, but it was still necessary to understand the link between the two settings to comprehend the page.

Some conclusions can be drawn from this discussion:

- Readers adopt different styles even within similar abilities.
- Reading strategies such as references forward and backward are dependent upon the textual information they are given and on the types of knowledges and skills they have.
- Effective application of both skills and knowledge give the key to comprehension.

- Reading styles are therefore not only dependent upon the form of the texts, but also upon other factors, such as reading skills and intertextual knowledge.
- Even the same text may require a different style of reading at different points; a competent reader will adopt these different techniques where appropriate.
- Those who made a more accurate reading of the text used and switched between both linguistic and iconic codes to provide information and ranged between the two codes to confirm or re-assess original suppositions. That is they read at a higher level, that of diegesis.

### *Text C Canardo*

In the *Canardo* story, there are significant and cultural references, such as to the Algerian War and to a *film noir* style of detective and gangster stories. It also has a more sophisticated story line than the other two extracts already discussed with strong moral messages about animal experimentation and about taking responsibility for one's own actions. As with text B it did not require this knowledge for understanding the basic narrative structure of the section read by the students. It is, on the other hand, less self-contained than the other two texts as the opening and final frames are more enigmatic, that is using the hermeneutic of the narrative structure. The opening frame sets the scene and shows the hero, Ferdinand, about to enter the doctor's house illegally. In the last frame we see Ferdinand's horrified reaction when he has got past the guards using his guerrilla knowledge and first views the interior. In order to heighten the dramatic effect we do not see the cause of his expression. This is revealed only once the page has been turned. Like the *Famous Five* story it uses the comic conventions such as speech and thought bubbles, graphics, and neologisms as well as framing devices. This text also requires the ability to read multiple perspectives and different points of view in the same and succeeding frames which builds up the narrative suspense. It thus provides additional elements to text B for readers to negotiate meaning.

A level pair 9, who had the style of first describing the pictures in the *Famous Five* rather than giving opinion or narrative options as they described the frames, kept to a similar format. Their initial reaction was [C9, 1] “This looks extremely funny” (The tone of voice and follow up discussion showed that ‘funny’ meant peculiar rather than comedic. The response from the ‘blind’ student showed that he had also gained this meaning from the tone of voice in which ‘funny’ was spoken). They again worked through generic conventions and they finally conclude [C9, 88-9] “sounds like some kind of detective thing because of what the dog is doing acting like a detective,” but there is still doubt which reveals that the reader can sense the added complexity of the story without quite being able to formalise his thoughts, because he concludes, “I don’t know.”

In addition to the action the setting and the *mise en frame* provided vital information to their working through generic possibilities [C9, 5] “It looks like one of those spooky ghost stories. It’s a spooky house . . . many windows, blackened windows, the bricks are all red, the clouds are dark and grey.” [C9, 9] “and straight in front of you to the right there’s a big creaky old black tree with no leaves and trunk going off at weird angles.” This symbolic use of the tree, which is heavily fore-grounded in the design, provided the information on which they conclude the spooky atmosphere. Thus they have assessed the style and form from the initial scan of the visual clues. In order to understand this page fully, more detailed observation is needed. As they scan over the picture they pick up the small shadowy figure in the background. This is significant as it gives the reader the dual points of view within the same frame: [C9, 15] “...there’s like a big brown oak door an archway, and in front of this is a tiny shadow with someone holding a stick.” This enables them to change perspective with the next frame.

[C9, 17-18] “The next frame ...it seems to be from inside the oak doorway.”

Eventually the complexity of this scene with its changes of narrative perspective becomes too great for Jim to describe,

[C9, 25-6] “Next frame which is the hero looking in front of the hero towards him as if we’re ...don’t worry about that,” and he abandons the attempt.



They comment upon the use of punctuation marks to explain emotion or reaction, [C9, 81] “Lots of question marks on his face” and also to the neologism [C9, 74] “and a big ‘puff’ sign”; and indirectly to the conventions for thought in the comic [C9,74] “...and he’s thinking, at least he won’t be suffering it more,” showing clear understanding of the comic form.

As the reading progresses between Jim and James it becomes more fluent and rapid in style until the story is being told without explicit reference to the form, but to the actual content. The form is implicit in telling the tale. In this transcript extract the movement or relay from words to images and to inference is explicit, [C9, 81-85] “he looks a bit dazed, and then there’s a big wooden gates opened, and you hear these big gurring noise and he’s also wondering what’s happening.”

They conclude by focusing upon the motivation and action of the characters, [C9, 90-3] “Sounds like he’s pretty smart and he’s got a few tricks up his sleeve” “Sounds like he’s quite violent as well, or he can be when he needs to be,” and finally assess the absent character, the doctor, from the information they have gleaned from the written text, “The bloke he’s out to get obviously a doctor, sounds like the bad guy, or otherwise he wouldn’t need all the protection around the place.” This refers back to line 13 and the mention of the doctor’s house.

Gina and Beverley, [7] work on the establishing of setting rather than the overall look as their way into the style of the page. The description, like Jim and James, is again detailed:

[C7, 4-5] “I get this from the dark clouds in the background, the house is run down lots of ivy. The tree is spindly and the dog had a bemused expression on him.” The instrumental style of reading by detailed description of individual frames continues. There is a clear build-up of character from the use of semic codes, [C7,1 2-14] “and this wolf is wearing a long trench coat ...he is sinister, because out of the darkness we can see his white eyes shining ...” whilst the hero, Ferdinand, is perceived as [C7, 17-19] “close-up of the dog’s eyes, peering over the grassy (mound) ...that he’s slightly scared because his eyes are bulging and his pupils are very small.” At this point, [C7, 14-17] they are not quite sure if the character is the hero or the villain. As Ferdinand is an anti-hero this is a perceptive ambiguity. “In the background is

the woods with speech marks coming out of the wood saying, ‘Jesus this place is locked up tighter than a drum’ ...that was the dog from the previous frame saying that from out of the bush, which probably means that this wolf is house breaker.”

It is not until the end that they give a similar overall comment which pair 9 had made at the beginning, [C7 103] “Well [um] obviously [um] it sounds very strange [um]”

For the student who is reading the comic aloud to her partner the critical point in understanding comes in the frame where the device in the ‘wolf’s’ head is found. [C7, 79-80] “[um oh] then the dog says ‘Jesus him too’ and he’s got one of those horrible devices in his skull poor bastard.” The discussion about the meaning and possible story line after this revelation falters to begin with on the anthropomorphic nature of the story, [C7, 103] “Well [um] obviously [um] it sounds very strange [um] it’s obviously not realistic, the dogs.” To help them out of the stalled discussion, Gina offers help as a starting point for her partner, which immediately confirms the framework that Beverley has been establishing. This gives her the key to the diegesis. [C7, 107-110] “right I was going to say it sounds like a private investigator going into a the world ...I reckon private eye and his language is says [um] it’s obviously some kind of conspiracy and someone is brainwashing people with devices in the back of their heads . . .” Although they do not identify the doctor as the villain, they have assessed one of the main themes of the narrative from the image of the brain implant and the words within the frame.

Comic conventions, such as the use of lines to suggest the movement of the character, are used. For example, [C7, 94] “Looks as if he’s running because he’s got some lines coming out from behind him” and [C7, 96-97] “because what are coming from behind this wall are sound effects which are grr, eek, clink.” This contrasted with Jim and James [9] who had commented upon some of the formal aspects of the comic form, but had then incorporated them into their description of events, as with [C9, 82] “You hear these big gurring noise” rather than describing them as separate elements.

### **The GCSE students**

Given the more complex nature of the *Canardo* story, it was not surprising that the GCSE students were given to few words when they were asked to tackle it. Like the A level pairs they did establish the atmosphere [C5, 8] “Looks quite empty, dark, really, really dark clouds.” They also note the symbolic use of the weather, [C5, 9] “weather signified doom, gloom.” Although given to fewer verbal details, they had obviously set off on a similar line of approach.

These students also identified some of the characteristics of the comic form, [C5,14] “speech bubble carry (the) thought bubble,”

They do suggest a possible narrative from the information, but their reading of this is very staccato.

[C5 14-16] “He walks away, then he’s screaming

Then he’s close-up and then he’s screaming

He’s just gone mad.”

None of the students picked up the reference to Algeria. Obviously this is understandable given the time lapse since this story was first published in 1981 and the fact that it was originally written for a French speaking audience. Nor do they comment on the philosophical reflection on fear given by Ferdinand in frames three and four.

### **Summary**

The A level students provide a detailed reading using the visual and verbal cues; even so they do not refer to every aspect of the information provided. The more complex nature of the drawings, as well as the extended reading necessary, probably lead them to absorb the information and then to select the significant points from which they could make sense. This enabled them to convey to their partner as coherently as possible the narrative using both visual and verbal cues. The pairs mention the metal in the head of the guard, [C9, 70-1] “Oh and something’s come

off the /top of his head, and there's a metal panel on the top of his head." And after quoting the words, [C7, 76-79] "The wolf a patch of hair has been removed from the wolf's/head. There is a square of metal . . . /Device in his head," because they have not been privy to the previous part of the story, they comment no further upon the reasons for this plate during the initial reading. At a later stage in the discussion pair 7 do suggest a possible story line from the device seen in the head, [C7, 132] "dog private eye investigate something to do with brain washing of some description." And pair 9 link the unseen doctor with the nefarious actions. [C9, 92]

Given that they had to reconstruct the narrative from partial information they provide an accurate assessment of the genre and the characters. They assess the reason for the guards around the house from both the visual and verbal information and link it into a narrative proposition, [C9, 92-3] "The bloke he's out to get obviously a doctor, sounds like the bad guy, or otherwise he wouldn't need all the protection around the place." They also realise that the anthropomorphic characters are a convention of the comic, [C9, 36-39] "and he's talking to a big black bulldog type of character . . . he's in a purple garish suite with a tie and stuff. It looking like a big fat man." [C7, 130] "...so it's a cartoon that they've taken a story line and they've just made it into animals."

[C9, 84-5] "Then you see him up close he's looking towards us as if we're in the fence, and he's looking through the door, startled, 'son of a bitch' startled ." They do not comment on the irony of this statement.

It is a detailed reading that moves between the visual and verbal within the frame to provide a competent reading at the level of the diegesis.

The GCSE students also give the animal characters human reactions and emotions, [C5, 2-3]. They refer to the comic conventions of speech and thought bubbles, [C4, 10] "speech bubble carry thought bubble." The dark, gloomy setting is also understood, [C, 1] "trees, branches, no leaves" and their reading of the connotations are implicit in the way that there is emphasis on the setting, [C5, 6-8] "dark gloomy cloudy/ ...looks quite empty, dark, really really dark clouds." But in comparison to the A level students their reading of this story is much briefer and less detailed. They also do not address any possible narrative from the extract that they are looking at

even though they read some of the written text, [C, 11] “jeezus him too”, and know that there is something, “going on inside the house” [C5, 15-16]. They do not appear to have arrived at a critical point in their reading where they can take the information forward nor make inferential walks and suggest possible narratives.

In addition to the points made on text B about the strategies, skills and knowledge required for comprehension certain other points can be made about the reading of this text:

- The convention of animals with human characteristics that comes from comics for young children was known to all the pairs.
- The complexity of the narrative with multiple perspectives required greater levels of detailed references within the diegesis. This made it a much more complex narrative to describe. References which were required were forward (cataphoric) and backward (anaphoric), textual and situational.
- As with text B the written text provided essential information about the motivation of the characters. Here the references were sometimes anaphoric “Better keep an eye out if you let him get away you can say bye bye to your fix” and “What bozo said the brave man was afraid before, the coward during ... and the reckless one, afterwards?” None of the pairs commented upon how these interchanges established relationships between characters or how they commented upon the actions of the individual characters in a general philosophical way.
- The written code, as in text B, provided essential narrative information that Ferdinand had escaped and was a danger to the doctor if he entered the house. This ‘essential’ information was conveyed to the ‘blind’ partners.
- The images provided information for setting, generic expectations and style through the secondary codes. The pairs made comment on this and skilfully used the setting to help establish style and genre. In fact they appeared less confused than with text B which switched between two settings. This may have been a result of the more detailed art work from which they could gather information as well as the fact that there was only a single setting based around the house.
- As with text B by moving or relaying at the larger unit level between the images and the information within the written text, the readers built up information and

possible narratives. The narrative proposed by pair 7 reconstructs the story quite accurately and reveals that essential word and image information have been synthesised, [C7, 109-125] “I reckon private eye....some kind of conspiracy and someone is brainwashing people with devices in the back of their heads and he ...trying to infiltrate this sort of set up to expose someone, they know that he’s escaped ...there’s a big boss ...and it’s him doing the implanting ...he’s getting into the house to free someone he knows when he says ‘son of a bitch’ he must have seen something ...quite disturbing ...”

#### *Text D Judge Dredd*

This text was the most complex of the ones used. It consisted of the conflation of the genre of the super-hero in the character of Judge Dredd famous as a law enforcer, and the teenage stories of Adrian Mole. To add to the complexity the Mole character is a cockroach. The first part is written as though from the point of view of the cockroach writing in his diary. The second part of the story is of the kitchens in which the cockroach lives. This is from an omniscient point of view showing the arrival of Judge Dredd in the role of hygiene law enforcer. The black humour is therefore built upon intertextual knowledge and parody. There is no direct visual link between the cockroach and Dredd story except by implication of setting. Even the written text signifies the different narratives, with the cockroach story being in lower case and the Dredd story in upper case. This complexity of design required detailed reading of the written text, particularly of the cockroach story, to understand the connection. It was therefore a more difficult story to understand and provided significant challenges until the narrative connection between the cockroaches eating the dirt and the health inspection by Judge Dredd was made. In this layout the title frame did not appear in the normal position of top left, but at the right beneath another frame. This position helped to reveal how the readers moved in and out to qualify previous points. The discussions showed how the readers had scanned for the written information to confirm the possible genre and narrative structure.

A Level students Ben and Martin at once note that [D8,1-3] “we seem to have snippets of two different articles ...the secret diary of Adrian Cockroach,” Beverly and Gina take until line [D7, 22-3] to make direct reference to the title. “OK fifth box in bubble writing, it says, the secret diary of Adrian Cockroach aged thirteen and a half months.” Their discussion reveals that Gina has already scanned the title to establish character before this point, although she had not done it initially as her comment [D7,12] “And the picture seems to be of a large insect” shows. It isn’t until line 16 that the reader states, “I can now see it’s a cockroach.” This knowledge could only really be known from reading the title frame, not from seeing the images. The scan forward to the title frame has enabled her to understand the first part of the story. The critical point in the reading has been reached by a combination of picture (insect) and word (cockroach).

This pair [7] continue to give a detailed reading of the sequence of frames and indicate knowledge of the character Judge Dredd, and his insignia [D7, 63-4] “now the final scene is the picture of the character Judge Dredd we can tell that because he’s wearing his badge”, but not of the Adrian Mole reference. They notice points about the way that meaning is created through graphicacy and comic conventions, for example by bold type, [D7, 70-1] “and dandruff is in heavy type. Then there is another little speech bubble which is all in heavy type.” And the use of sound [D7, 29] “I can see they are crashing through a door because it says ‘crash’.”

Initially the discussion establishes the ambiguity they feel in having two apparently disconnected stories, but they work through this by using the evidence from the text and from their previous knowledge [D7, 75-78] “I’m not sure that the first part is linked to the second part, insects telling stories, but after gets through the diary, obviously someone who is doing a health inspection in a restaurant, which is obviously not clean.” [D7, 82-89] “I believe that the two little stories are linked. It’s an amusing tactic that these comics use, because the cockroach is obviously living on all the dirt in the kitchen. . .It’s set in the future isn’t it, so that’s why because I was confused by the ...they’re quite smart dinner jackets, but they are all

padding aren't they. Yeh weird, you can tell it's futuristic ... comforting to know you'll have cockroaches in the future."

It is in this discussion that the process of making meaning using the various codes is revealed. The comic conventions, genre knowledge about science fiction, the stereotyped dress code used to establish the role of the super-hero, the waiters and the chef, "that's a stereotypical chef's outfit," the semiotic knowledge of images "And the way he looks bigger than everyone, towering over them, figure of authority", and finally the reading of the written text, is just one example of how the process of switching required between the different signifying systems and frameworks of knowledge are synthesised to create understanding and help to establish coherence in the text.

The ironic tone which entered pair 7's reading of this text, "comforting to know you'll have cockroaches in the future", was also repeated in the reading by the second pair, Ben and Martin, [D8, 18-20] "I didn't realise that cockroaches have friends, I wasn't aware of this / I didn't realise cockroaches had a social life / I didn't realise cockroaches could talk." It was interesting to listen to the way that the tone in the A Level students' reading changed as they began to realise that this was a narrative based upon the development of genre parody. They began with serious intentions but soon ironic asides appeared. Every few lines they tried to get back to the 'expected' serious reading but it was difficult to sustain given the text. Ben and Martin's reading was particularly speckled with this style, although tone is difficult to convey in print, one example is given which I think suggests it: [D8, 64-68]

B "quite low {angle}

M cockroaches are quite low generally, they average about two centimetres tall I think

B I'm glad you know about cockroaches

M I do I've studied them in great detail

B anyway let's get on."

The fact that the *Judge Dredd* story was partly parodic in its style, form and characterisation, obviously meant that those readers who picked up on one or more



of these signifiers also felt that they could enter into this mode of discourse when reading the narrative.

In contrast the GCSE students did not attempt the parodic tone. Although they, like the A level students, did move forward and backwards through the narrative to modify their conclusions as further information became available in the sequence. For example, like pair 7 they initially refer to the image of the insect and then specify its type having scanned across to the title frame, [D4, 2-3] “next frame a bug looking at us / cockroach going towards others as if trouble” and pair 5 similarly, [D5, 6] “next frame big close up of fly same shape as last one - cockroach type.”

Pair 4, like the A level pairs, appear to know the character Dredd, [D4, 6] “Judge Dredd walking through door with big crash” and focus most of their discussion on the second story where he appears, rather than that of the cockroach, even though they have read the title after looking at the frame above it, [D4, 5] “the title frame. The Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach aged thirteen and a half”, which appears to focus on the cockroach as the main character. But this pair move into the second story without any further comment on Adrian or cockroaches. They are using their prior knowledge of the character Dredd and the genre with which he is associated to help them focus on a possible narrative. Like the A level pairs these students identify the clothes as important visual signifiers, [D4, 7] “Two people behind look like bouncers with bow ties” but further on adjust this assumption as a result of other information [D4, 16] “these guys aren't bouncers - they're waiters.”

The second pair of GCSE students also try working on the characters from the iconic information, [D5, 16-18] “Next to him walking behind is waiters dressed like waiters weird boots/in/Another bloke there. He's a waiter as well because he's got a bow-tie.” But with the Dredd character this pair has more difficulties, [D5, 12] “big tall bloke metal gear, bit like robot, massive boots . . .” They make no reference to Judge Dredd, either from previous knowledge or from reading the written text. They note the insignia of Dredd but not its significance, [D5, 34] “He's got a big shield on his jacket - a shield shape.” They are obviously using the semic clues of dress and the stereotypes of representation as an essential means of trying to get a

purchase on the narrative, not any intertextual knowledge, [D5, 21] “In background there’s a chef, (I’ve) put chef’s hat on” and later, [D5, 31-3] “Standing next to him the big robot bloke looking angry, see his fangs/Is he big? / He’s wearing the boots isn’t he.” This pair finds no way into the narrative and can make no sense of the linking narratives, so their discussion stops abruptly. Having started, [D5,1] “I don’t know what it is”, by the end they appear to be no wiser, and the final comment leaves the enigmas unsolved, [D5, 34] “He’s got a big shield on his jacket - a shield shape.” They have not found the critical point to understand the narrative. In looking at this reading it is possible to see why they were unable to reach the critical point. Only one comment to the written text is made, and that is the word ‘cockroach’. There was apparently no reason for this lack of reference to the written code. It seemed that without the relay between the two codes, and only using the images it was impossible for Hannah and Lyndsay to read the narrative beyond the basic level of denotation. Perhaps their lack of success is established with the first comment [D5, 1] “I don’t know what it is.” At a more personal level perhaps Graddol’s (1987) comment is appropriate here in that reading is more to do with “personal experience, knowledge and motivation.”

Pair 4 from the GCSE cohort actually identify both main characters using the text to help. [D4, 5-6] and “The title frame, ‘The Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach aged thirteen and a half’ / ‘Judge Dredd’ walking through the door with big ‘crash’.” They also make some sense of the story by identifying the point about the dirt using both the images and the words, “He puts finger on the table .../ stuff on it / ...Judge Dredd looking at a cook /‘What kind of soup are you making Pal - Dandruff./Get a hat on” [D4, 9-13]. This reading is facilitated by the fact that the reader, Ben, apparently reaches the critical point of understanding about halfway through the discussion [D4, 8] “I get this.” As he continues to read, Ben enters into the narrative to such an extent that he begins reading with an American accent related to the type of comic superhero characters like Dredd.

The movement between initial reading and a return to adjust miscueing from subsequent information is shown in the statement [D4, 16] “These guys aren’t bouncers - they’re waiters.” This indicates the way that the reader moves around the

text in a circularity that may be necessary in a form which allows, through images, more freedom in interpretation. It is only as the options are narrowed from the initial frame where the ‘waiters’ appear to where the idea of ‘bouncers’ doesn’t make sense because of the information given in the written code, that it is readjusted. This happens between line 7 and line 16. Similarly Hannah and Lyndsay look at the pictures with an initial reading, and then obviously readjust this reading with reference to the written text. This is their only reference to the written text. [D5, 6-7] “next frame big close up fly same shape as last one - cockroach type thing yes it is under crack in skirting board or hole or something.” Here the connection being made between the image and the word is seen as Hannah adjusts from the word ‘fly’ to the word ‘cockroach’.

### Summary

- This text provided a single narrative but with two distinct main characters. In order to understand this structure it was necessary to make the causal link between the dirt, the cockroaches and Judge Dredd’s actions.
- This link was only possible when the written and visual codes were used. Where they were not used the critical point in the narrative reading was not reached.
- The visual codes provided the narrative point of view of the cockroach as distinct from the third person view of Dredd. This was also signalled in the typography and the text.
- Intertextuality established through the written code was an additional framework for understanding the parodical nature of the story.<sup>7</sup>
- The differences between a competent reading and one with the difficulty of not being able to access any of these frameworks and thus unable to understand the connections between the narrative strands, can be seen in comparing pairs 5 and 7. Hannah and Lyndsay signal their difficulties in the first statement [D5, 1] “I don’t know what it is.” No attempt is made in their reading to give any cause, or identify one of the cockroaches as the speaker or diary writer, nor to understand

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<sup>7</sup> Neale (1980) quoting Lukow and Ricci refers to these practices in terms of genre as ‘inter-textual relay’

what the Dredd character was doing. This contrasts with the A level students who conclude, [D7, 104] “You can work it out the narrative.”

## Discussion

This chapter has engaged in the detailed analysis, mainly qualitative, of responses students made whilst reading extracts from comics to each other. The analysis has highlighted certain interesting areas for discussion.

The images generally gave secondary information on characters and settings creating generic expectations, whilst the words were important in rooting the images into the narrative structure. In Barthesian terms, these could be called the secondary and primary codes. The secondary codes provided essential information to build inferences and the primary codes were often used to confirm inferences.

The style of describing or reading by frame which was adopted by most of the readers revealed a phenomenon which I have called the development of a *critical point* in the reading. It was at this critical point that the students began to reveal an understanding of the narrative within their own terms. The critical point has been described in the detailed discussion of each of the texts and transcripts and is taken up in the discussion on the possible models which could be applied to the readings done in this study. If the students did not reach this critical point then understanding of the text appeared to have failed. This was the case with much of the work done by the LSS pairs, but was also apparent at other levels.

The critical point was not the same for each pair; even with the same text it appeared at different moments with different pairs. This confirms the opinion that understanding depends partly on the conceptual difficulty for the individuals rather than on the inherent structure of the text. Readers appeared to develop a critical point in understanding which was related to the type and style of information that

they were processing within the text, their skills and framework of knowledges and their affective response to the text.

When there was teacher input in the way of open or closed questioning, as in the plenary sessions, there was more direct reference to form, but this did not necessarily convey more understanding especially if the critical point had not been reached. This was evident in the discussions with the LSS students.

The most accurate readings used signifying systems in combination with other knowledges such as knowledge of types of stories and knowledge of types of characters. Where they were able to link into such frameworks such as generic codes it became easier to establish narrative understanding. But they also showed the ability to make imaginative leaps by filling in the spaces in between, and to propose possibilities.

The readers had to use a combination of text, image and knowledge of the form to convey the narrative to the listeners. This aligns with the model that language systems are culturally and socially located, and assumes that lack of knowledge, experience and skills can inhibit motivation. As these texts were not chosen by the students this may have inhibited understanding. Textual coherence appeared to be established as a result of the holistic process of reading. This aligns with the integration or synthesis model of reading. If they failed to integrate the areas of accessing knowledge, textual semiotics, cognitive frameworks, combined with imagination, the readers were unsuccessful in reaching the critical point from where they could understand the extract and convey this understanding linguistically to their partner.

A process of scanning and re-adjustment of reading was constantly in progress (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). This is revealed diagrammatically in the mapping done on the transcripts which is discussed in the next chapter. This process showed how the readers switched between codes to confirm or adjust suppositions and propositions. They also considered the total narrative coherence.

If we understand relay partly as a process of switching between codes to create meaning it may provide a key to the way understanding is constructed at the level of the single sign and over the totality of the text. Barthes suggested that relay works at the supra-segmental level, at the diegetic level, as the narrative appears in the single sign as well as the totality of signs.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter there has been a detailed analysis of each of the readings to illustrate similarities and differences between pairs and across ability groups. The above points are a summary of the findings which resulted from these comparison across readings. The quantitative analyses provided certain objective guidelines for the relative natures of the texts. They were unsatisfactory for analysing the various discourses in the discussions and insensitive to the individual nature of each reading. The ways in which the readers responded and shifted positions in reading revealed more about the nature of reading text and image than did a global count of references. The analysis has revealed that readers may have individual approaches but that they are also using similar techniques and reference similar frameworks. The next chapter uses these detailed analyses to propose certain models to explain the different process of reading images and texts. It considers the semiotic or textual perspective and the individual reader perspective as two possible models. It then proposes that it may be possible to integrate these into one model.

## Chapter 8

### Reading Comics: Coherence, Cohesion and Critical Point

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews the analysis done on the data collected and the reading styles observed in the previous Chapters 6 and 7. It leads to the proposal of three possible models for understanding the process by taking different theoretical perspectives. Each model has advantages and disadvantages depending on where the focus is being placed in analysing the readings. This is related to whether it is at the level of a single sign or at the level of the total process with a macro over view.

The previous chapter discussed how the research design encouraged the participants to describe and therefore externalise a normally internal process. Inevitably speech has its own bias. It can only reflect a part of the processing of information by the brain, and the subjective selection from that process by the reader. This is part of what Roz Ivanic (1998) calls, with reference to the construction of writer identity in academic writing, 'the discursial self'. In this case the discursial self is portrayed through the speaker's verbalising a construct of narrative from a selection of discursial resources available to them in reading, understanding and communicating.

This discursial identity and its process is reflected in the evidence that each reading was unique in its pattern, even within similar ability ranges. The mapping (see Appendix 8) reveals this individuality in a diagrammatic form. It also shows similarities, such as that in each successful reading there was a combination of elements to provide a reading event. These included scanning, detailed denotative and connotative deconstruction of the text, references both intra and inter-textual, and readjustments of meaning and inferences that came from the signifying systems. All of these contributed to comprehension through a synthesis of cognitive behaviours.

In the following discussion the focus is upon certain aspects of reading that were observed through the study of the data. These were: firstly, the cohesion of the text created by the text and by the reader through depiction and description; secondly, how the process of switching between signifying systems created textual coherence from apparent incoherence of the partial text; thirdly, how a critical point developed where the reader appeared to comprehend and then make sense of the page for their listening partner.

## **Reading Images and Text**

The readings of the comics were not inevitably linear, even where there was obviously a strong graphic and narrative design to lead the eye through the text in a particular syntagmatic arrangement. This may be the effect of the free-floating nature of images as Barthes noted, and the way that they allow us to read within and between them, or of the partial nature of the text. But even if the reading conformed to the linear design of the narrative plot and preferred reading path between frames, the individual readings within the frames proved much more anarchic. In order to identify the different information provided by the readings the functions of both words and images were considered.

The readings usually began at the denotative level. This was partly to do with the nature of a selected page taken out of context of the whole narrative, but also as a result of the directions given to the readers (Appendix 7). These factors created an artificial situation. This was inevitable but designed to create intellectual challenge and engagement with the text and therefore discussion and debate.

To re-cap: images may provide syntactical information through composition, colour, tone, aerial perspective, linear perspective, and size. These provide parallel systems to written grammar.<sup>1</sup> Even the less replete of iconic representation still provides

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<sup>1</sup> Langer, (1986) has challenged this view believing that it takes language into areas which are pre-conceptual (see Chapter 3)



much of this information. Analysts, such as Gombrich (1960), Barthes (1977), Nodelman (1988), Meek (1991), and more recently, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have referred to the way that pictures can have a grammar.

In terms of narrative information an image can be very exact, specifying the time of day or the position of an object; but it can also be more ambiguous, less specific than a notational system, revealing affective states between the given and the new, the ideal and the real (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). It is possible to have a series of images where there is no written text and where the juxtaposition of images provides the narrative to be 'written' by the reader through the semiotic codes, the narrative realism, the representation and the composition. This can happen at points in all graphic texts but at the extreme it can be used effectively throughout the text, as with Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman*. This is the exception and usually in a graphic text the written information is used to direct the narrative, to avoid ambiguities and help to create character amongst other purposes.

## Depiction and Description

Goodman refers to the function of the two systems of word and image as depiction and description.<sup>2</sup> In a comic these are at work simultaneously. The representational system, depiction, is combined with the specific meaning systems of the comic which include for example, the use of lines and frames. Description is linked to comic elements such as speech bubbles. The sign can therefore be depicted (image) but also described (for example with speed lines) by the comic conventions and use of ideogram. This can provide additional information to the image, but also to the words associated with it, particularly through the style of the speech bubble, as with a jagged edged conveying emotion or dynamics.<sup>3</sup>

The linguistic system is an abstract, analogue system that describes rather than depicts. In the comic, with its use of neologisms and graphic design such as bold

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<sup>2</sup> Salomon. (1981)

<sup>3</sup> More detailed analysis is given in the chapter on the language of comics

and italic typeface, this can also be said to be part of the depiction code and therefore linked into the other signifiers. The cohesion of the text is through the information given in both the images and the text that employs the functions of both depiction and description. This also involves grammatical and semantic links across the signifying systems as well as the individual sentence coherence, that is the syntactic syntagm in both systems.

## Coherence and Cohesion

The study showed that students who had competent reading skills were able to link together the separate systems - iconic, linguistic, comic - and read them in a combination that allowed for coherent narrative possibilities from only partial information. For example, they recognised the setting in the *Famous Five* story of the abandoned churchyard through the iconic clues. They were given the information about the hidden treasure from the written text, and they understood the style of speech from the bubbles. They were able to reconstruct the story line using other references, such as the escaped gangsters and the Golden Galleon, using their knowledge of the genre involved.<sup>4</sup> The linguistic message appeared to provide the cement to link the frames, fulfilling a similar function to intersentential ties, and to confirm or root their suppositions about the more ambiguous images. The combination of the syntactical and semantic information provided them with a text that had coherence (logic) and cohesion (the parts fitting together) even if their reading was not totally accurate in terms of the whole story.

Similarly, the competent readers were also able to reconstruct the various narrative perspectives of the characters in *Canardo* even if they did not fully understand cultural references such as that to the Algerian War. By using the written text they could identify that there was a plot concerning other characters than those in the frames, and that it was linked to brain experiments. By using the visual signifiers they could conclude that whatever the cause it had horrific effects. In other words they could construct a textual coherence through the combination or cohesion of the

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<sup>4</sup> inter-textual relay (Neale. S. 1980)

images and text, and the semantic relationship between the two vocabularies. This coherence is part of a narrative design. For example, narrative imperatives can be seen where there is a localised frame holding the reader's attention at a specific point in the syntagm in order to allow an enigma to be established. The final frames in the research texts are examples of this when by this device the reader is encouraged to turn the page to discover: would Louise die? (text A), would Ann get back in time? (text B) what had Ferdinand seen? (text C) and what was Dredd going to do to the cooks? (text D) The cohesion of the text and its coherence are both required and are constructed through the switching between image, word and other codes. The reader will then reach a point where they are able to construct or 'write' the narrative for themselves and for their partner.

If the ambiguous nature of the iconic representation meant that its meaning was too free-floating, the readers had to use other signifying systems. If they failed to do this they also failed to build coherence in the text. For example, the LSS students failed to make the link between the image of the swollen river and the storm in *Going West* and the written text, "There was a lot of water. Peter was washed away". Here both the written words and the visuals combine to establish the problem. The cut to the evening around the camp fire combined with the words referring to the picture of Louisa in the wagon, "...all pray for little Louisa" signify a change of time and space. The LSS students who were reading this story did not connect these two scenes in a narrative causality even when leading questions were asked. The information had to be supplied by the teacher-researcher. Here the coherence of the text was not established, apparently through lack of switching between the two signifying systems and consequently with the apparent loss of cohesion between the frames in the text.

In the reading of the *Judge Dredd* story there was a different type of narrative jump between the diary of the cockroach and the inspection of the kitchen. This was the most difficult text to read. The key to the narrative coherence was in realising that the narrator was the cockroach. The visual linking frame was the appearance of the judge drawn from a very low (cockroach) point of view. Another significant element

was that the out of frame space was used, which required the reader mentally to reconstruct the characters as well as the narrative. In frame 7 we see the hand of one and the words of two characters, and the reader has to link these by creating meaning between and onto frame 8. As well as this complexity of structure, this page also had various cultural and genre references. These were part of the framework of knowledges that was required to facilitate understanding and connect the two narratives. Those who were successful in reading moved between the images and the text to re-adjust their initial ideas in order for the text to cohere. Those who did not, such as pair 5, stopped at the images and could therefore not switch between text and images to help create textual coherence and comprehension.

### **The Critical Point**

In this study the critical point is taken to be the moment where the reader and/or the ‘blind’ partner reveal that the text has been understood within their own terms. The understanding of the critical point is partly to do with the transcribed words, but also to do with the more elusive quality of the tone of the taped responses. If the coherence of a text is created through design and signifying systems to create a coherent narrative structure, it would be natural to assume that the critical point of understanding would come at a similar point or a particular frame in the responses of the students. It could also be assumed that readers of similar abilities would tend to understand the texts in the same pattern. The comparison of the critical points over the reading pairs does not confirm these propositions. What appeared were much more individual responses to the texts both within and across reading abilities.

The comparative responses in reading patterns revealed by the maps were therefore unexpected. If it was considered that the understanding of the texts could be expected to be similar within if not across ability ranges, they would be assumed to achieve a similar pattern of reading.. For example, in reading *The Famous Five* Mark and Ben, (GCSE) apparently found this critical point quite early, “Is this a totally different story?” [B4, 7] spoken in a self-reflective tone occurring at the point where the two stories are juxtaposed (frames 3 and 4). There is limited speech from

this pair so this cannot be a definite conclusion. With the GCSE pair 6 this point comes at the end of their reading [B6, 12] “Oh it’s about a prison escape.” Although the tape finishes here the possibility of a coherent reconstruction of the text, not evident even with the overall initial scan done by this pair, now seems possible. With the A level students it occurs at the half-way point in the discussion [B7, 38] “I’ve got a good idea what the narrative is here then.” This is only after they have read the whole page, and it may well have occurred earlier but was not vocalised by Gina. The critical point appears to come earlier with pair 8 when they are discussing frames 1-3 [B8, 18] “It sounds like some sort of kids’ adventure ...” where they establish the genre, propose the possible narrative and then build understanding of the text from there.

In *Canardo*, the critical point for pair 7 comes when Gina who is reading to Beverley arrives at frame 11 with the picture of the metal device implanted in the ‘wolf’s’ head in this frame. [C7, 79] This initiates their belief in the cause of the action, which they discuss later. [C7, 104-6] B “Right I was going to say it sound like a private investigator going into a the word/puts it sounds you know/I reckon private eye and his language is says [um] it’s obviously some kind of a conspiracy/and someone is brainwashing people with devices in the back of their heads.” With the other A level pair it is more difficult to judge the exact point. It is probably around line 50 when James interrupts Jim to say, “So the guy must be the guard then.” (frame 6) This seems to clarify for Jim the roles of the characters, and although he does not acknowledge this interruption his following description becomes much more fluent and more rapid in style. At the end James answers Jim’s question, “What do you think happens?” by focusing upon the function of the guard. This appears to have been the key to his understanding of the text, “he’s trying to get into the house but it’s heavily guarded, it sounds like some/kind/of detective thing because of what the dog is doing acting like a detective, I don’t/ know.” [87-89]

In *Judge Dredd* the reader in one pair of GCSE students [D4, 8] finds the critical point early on, “I get this” (frame 6) although there is no further explanation to his partner. The reader in the other pair [D5] appears to fail to get to the critical point.

Her initial statement shows that she has scanned the frames and page but has not made any positive identification, “I don’t know what it is.” [D5, 1] The reconstruction fluctuates around the level of denotation with occasional inferences. Even picking up the frame with the word cockroach, [D5, 7] “next frame big close up fly same shape as last one - cockroach type” doesn’t lead to any narrative links between the frames. The A level students, Beverley and Gina, [D7, 17-20] find their critical point in the *Dredd* story when they identify who is telling the story, “I can now see it’s a cockroach and then . . . the picture is the last roach, which is the main character.” and when they identify Judge Dredd as another main character, “so the person in the uniform is obviously Judge Dredd.” [41] It is Gina, the reader, who finally gives the clue that textual coherence has been established for her when she says “I believe that the two little stories are linked.” [82]

It can be seen that none of these critical points apparently occurs in the same point of the story for the different pairs. The critical point appears therefore to be a reflection of the conceptual understanding of the reader and is dependent upon how they have linked together information from the three signifying systems to create textual coherence. In the example above [D7] it was the reading of the word ‘cockroach’ in frame 5 that gave Gina the clue, whereas for pair 4 it was the visual recognition of the Dredd character in frame 6 that provided the clue. Arriving at the critical point could also influence the way that the reader then related information to the listener. Ben [D 4] changed his style of reading after line 8 when he said “I get this”, by adding colour to his reading putting the words into a pseudo-American accent. Another example of this was the reading of Jim and James. [C 9] After the initial concerns, they establish the genre. Jim then becomes more confident in his reading referring to both visual and verbal signifying systems.

The LSS students were unable to find this critical point in reading the extracts. They appeared to need to be able to locate the narratives into concrete experience with which they could identify. If they did this it often meant comments becoming only tangentially linked to the text. They made some suppositions from the images, such as deciding upon the feelings of the characters, “The boy's arms is in the air and he's probably thinking be careful.” The discussion was also more text-centred only when

there was an obvious link between the experience of the reader and the story, such as the reference to “it’s really easy to get out of jail.” [B2,6] The A level and GCSE pairs also made extra- or inter-textual references such as to similar genres, styles, or to cultural connections, characters and architecture. They were using these references to help filter out possibilities and to formulate narrative options.

Sometimes it did lead to confusion as with Ben and Martin [8] reading the *Famous Five* story. Ben is speaking, “and one geezer’s saying, ‘If Timmy’s right, the ingots’ I don’t know who the ingots are” and Martin tries to help out. Taking his cue from Ben’s “who” he suggests, “ingots are Indians”, Ben continues quoting the text, “the ingots are in the tomb” [6-7]. This was in spite of the fact that there are obviously no people inside the stone tomb. Ben makes no adjustment at this point and further on this miscueing re-appears when Martin states, [16-17] “so obviously they are looking for something the ingots I think they are some sort of ancient Indian thing aren’t they?” In spite of this miscueing they were still able to reach a critical point at the next line. Ben says, “it sounds like some sort of kid’s adventure, something like these three kids in a jungle looking for these Indians.” [18-19] Even though this is incorrect in terms of both the images and the words, they have established a textual coherence from which they can then work.

The critical point appears to be where the meaning of what has been ‘read’ begins to relate to a possible narrative option and to the reader’s response to the text. The subsequent comments begin to move in a more integrated way between the two signifying systems, depiction and description. If we use Barthes’ terminology, they move in relay to create a synthesised meaning. As the reader of the text may have internalised this critical point rather than verbalised it, evidence sometimes is circumstantial and related to the style of reading, the tone of voice and later comments that reveal earlier understanding. Gina, for example, was intent on giving descriptions and inferences for each of the frames and as she was constantly being asked for clarification from Beverley this made their comments easier to analyse. In contrast Jim described the texts frame by frame with few interruptions from James and so it is more difficult to assess his understanding from the taped responses.

It was noted that the critical point for the reader is not totally text-bound but is related to other factors. These include their conceptual understanding of the required reading, their ability to read at the higher level of the diegesis by moving between the two types of signification, the coherence and cohesion of the text and the readers' frameworks of knowledge and imaginative response to the text. In Barthesian terms, this relay would inevitably include the 'mythic' level of meaning.

Kress and van Leeuwen make an assumption that reading comic strips, because they have a linear narrative, follows a linear design; "Other kinds of pages (e.g. traditional comic strips) and images (e.g. line diagrams) are also designed to be read in this linear way." (p. 218) The mapping done on these readings of the comics indicate that there is a possible alternative view to Kress and van Leeuwen (ibid. p. 219). This is apparent in this study when anchorage is not dominant, but an extended narrative develops where 'relay', which combines the two signifying systems into a new meaning, is the discursual mode. The combination of semiotic systems provides the narrative information necessary for textual coherence and for the individual reading but not necessarily in the dominant linear form.

By mapping reading we can illustrate how comics work through linking image and text at the level of the single frame and at the level of the narrative so creating coherence. The maps also indicate the suggested critical point. The individual maps and comments specific to each map can be found in Appendix 8. A general discussion on the findings follows.

## **Mapping Reading**

The process of relay suggests a movement from one signifying system to another in a series of switching exchanges which not only confirms ideas but builds new options exponentially. This is clearly not the same as the linear movement of passing information along a set route as in a relay race where lanes are not switched. Switching can be at the level of the single word and icon. As an example it can be



seen in the relay of meaning between the word 'crash' describing the sound and the design of the word depicting the sound (text D, frame 6). Or it can be seen at the level of overall narrative. To understand the meaning it is necessary to read both the word and the image of the word and to see this set in the context of the rest of the elements. If we take out the word 'crash' or use a different design for the word, as with a commutation exercise, the meaning of the frame is modified.

In order to see this process in reading visually across the whole text the mapping technique was used. As previously stated each map is unique to the particular readings although certain similarities can be seen over the maps. This can probably partly be explained by the style of the particular texts in layout and framing and partly by the effect of the instructions given. By following the horizontal arrows in the maps it is possible to trace how each pair of readers has moved from the information levels, where they used both the images and words, towards inferences which they have drawn from this information. This movement is usually repeated several times in each of the readings and it is often associated with the point where images and words are being discussed together. As the discussions develop there is a movement from describing the information in the frames and inferences made, to a point where there is understanding of the narrative structure and the role of the characters. The vertical lines show how readers moved around the text moving forward and backwards to confirm or re-assess points. In competent readings this appeared to create a circularity. The maps are two-dimensional representations, but they suggested that a three-dimensional model that accounted for both vertical and horizontal moves and for the movement to points of understanding could be developed.

The horizontal levels in the maps can be summarised in a vertical figure similar to Barthes three levels:

*Figure 8.1 Levels in Mapping Reading*

<b>Level 1</b>	pictures and words at a decoding and denotative stage
<b>Level 2</b>	inferences and connotations based on level 1
<b>Level 3</b>	textual coherence and critical point - the core
	This is only possible if level 1 and 2 are complete

The mapping was based upon the following system:

When students describe or quote words and pictures without any inference made about meaning they are placed in the left hand column. Where inferences are made from these comments this movement to a second level is represented by horizontal arrows to the centre column. At the point where the students appear to have understood the core of the text there is a line into the right hand column or third level. Movements between these three levels and to references going forward and backward in the text are also represented through vertical lines.

The lines therefore show the links made between images and words by the students and also how and when the discussion moves around the text. For example, Gina and Beverley's discussion [B7] Appendix 6 and figure 8.5 in Appendix 8, show how they discuss the pictures from lines 1 to 10 and make inferences. Gina then reads the words of the text before returning to the images. Here each signifying system is being discussed separately. Just before line 20 the discussion combines both pictures and words, "You can see what it is the tomb bars of something in sacks (*pictures*) /The speech (*comic convention of speech bubble*) it's the treasure from the Golden Galleon (*words*) /So it's the treasure (*inference*). . ." Here the switching between the signifying systems of word and image is clearly visible in the map. The pattern established by this pair, with some minor differences, is of describing pictures, reading words and then making an inference by using both systems. This leads them to a point where they have reached a stage of making overall sense of the text at line 38. The mapping pattern then changes and the references across the text become much more complex as the readers switch frequently between images, words and inference. They also move forward and backwards within the text and through their

areas of knowledge. A circular movement between the three layers of understanding (information, inference and coherence) can be seen in the way that the arrow-heads point to the links being made. These are revealed in the discussion. They show how the readers are able to make further inferences and conclusions which relate back to the critical point and show its pivotal role in creating textual coherence. Jim and James (Appendix 8, figure 8.6) have a similar map in that they move forward and backward until line 50 when they reach the critical point and then the map shows a more circular movement. The comparison in these two maps (Appendix 8, figures 8.5 and 8.6) is interesting. The two pairs had apparently different styles of reading, but underlying the superficial differences in process was a similar structure in terms of the maps. In contrast Ben and Martin (Appendix 8, figure 8.10) identify a critical point quite early in their reading. This is then followed by a circularity before reverting to the more horizontal mode of reading.

A contrasting example is of Dan and Sarah (Appendix 8, figure 8.3) discussing the *Famous Five* text. Dan was the student who had made the initial scan of the images, “I’ll tell you first/the whole story is about kids, teenagers, playing.” [B6,1-2] They have a map that is unique in this set of readings because they start with an inference, obviously made after a holistic scan of the page. Afterwards it moves into the more regular pattern of image/word and inference. They finally enter the core of understanding or critical point (represented by the right-hand column) at the end of their reading. Here the discussion finishes. There is no opportunity to assess their understanding any further, so the map is truncated.

## Discussion

The maps indicate the individual nature of the reading process. For example, with text D there was no single agreed entry of words, pictures or other information for any of the pairs. The maps also show how readers emphasise one signifying system at particular points when building up information. They reveal that successful readings are associated with accessing the information from both words and pictures.

The processes involved not only switching between words and images, but also between different layers of the narrative and between levels of knowledge.

The maps help to indicate where the readers return to earlier points to clarify or add to information. In reading the graphic pages the words often appeared to give information to confirm propositions or inferences made by reading the images. They indicate that inferences could be made from the pictures (Appendix 8, figures 8.1 and 8.2) or the words, (Appendix 8, figure 8.3), but where they were used in combination there was a greater opportunity for a more successful reading (Appendix 8, figure 8.5). These inferences could be linked or involve other knowledges, such as the comic conventions or cultural knowledge, which together helped to create a critical point of understanding.

The mapping of responses shows in a two-dimensional model the contribution to each reading by the visual and verbal codes and thus helps in trying to see if patterns emerge. There are limitations of assessing understanding from spoken words as ideas may often be internalised but not stated until later. This will involve the reader selecting from possible options the information they are going to tell the ‘blind’ partner at a particular moment, in order to deliver as effectively as possible the page’s meaning.

The smaller eddies and the more macro swirls in the maps shown by arrows indicate where comments backward and forward reveal reflection, cross-checking, readjustments to previous inferences. Often where it is indicated that the critical point has been reached this is followed by more intensive reference around the text, (Appendix 8, figures 8.5; 8.6; 8.7; 8.10; 8.11). Where the critical point is not followed by such movement the reader, having internalised the meaning, appears to assume that the listener has also achieved this point of understanding. For example in figure 8.3 it is almost as though the reader, Dan, having said “Oh it’s about a prison escape”, feels that it is unnecessary to proceed any further. For him this explains the whole narrative he has been trying to describe. Whether his partner has reached this point cannot be assessed as the conversation stops at this point.

The fact that inferences are made does not necessarily lead to cohesive reconstruction or coherent narrative, or to the development of a critical point in understanding and comprehension. The LSS students made certain remarks that showed that they had connected the images with generic expectations, “Wild west, wild west sort of thing.” [A1, 1] They did not externalise any link with the other signifying systems. Similarly the GCSE [D5] students reading *Judge Dredd* found that they could not achieve understanding or a critical point when not using the signifying systems in combination. It seemed with the latter reading that the reader had closed off involvement with or response to, the text.

It seems that the sophistication of the reading was based upon a series of inferences made through the various systems. In numeric terms the pictures, by their more ambiguous nature, allowed for more of this type of comment. This is illustrated in the maps. The second highest processing for inference in numeric terms was where words and pictures appeared together in the same comments. It appeared that inferences were not sufficient to create full comprehension but they were a necessary part of the process.

### Three Models

The data from the transcripts and the information from the maps discussed above suggested different interpretations. Three models were formulated which could be applied to the readings depending upon the type of information being processed and the focus of discussion. Representing processes of communication by models has a long pedigree. Amongst others, Shannon and Weaver proposed a model in 1949 of a chain of mechanical events, Gerbner in 1956 developed a model to show communication as a social process, and Dance developed a helical model in 1967.

The three models proposed here for reading comics have some similarities with these previous designs. I have called them; *the continuum model*, *the paradigm or*

*framework model* and *the core and periphery spiral model*. The first looks at the level of the individual signs as they are used at a particular point in the reading and is text-based. The second shows the different areas of knowledge and shared references accessed and required by readers to understand a text. The final model explores the process of reading over the whole text and illustrates this process as a movement between areas of knowledge and along lines of usage. It therefore suggests a three-dimensional structure.

### The Continuum Model

This model is text-based and helps to analyse the comic language and the reader's use of the language at a particular moment. In this model each sign is attributed meaning and a position along a continuum of signifiers. This is according to the use at the specific point by both the writer or illustrator and by the reader.

At one end of the continuum there are the arbitrary symbols of the linguistic text, these are the words which through semantic and syntactical arrangement create meaning. In this there are narrative devices such as ellipses, tropes and multiple perspectives. Towards the pivot point of the continuum there are words like the neologisms that create meaning from their visual look as well as their onomatopoeic reference. Words such as CRASH in the *Judge Dredd* story in frame 6 or ARG in frame 5 of *Canardo* can be placed at these points. Then there is the use of non-word symbols to suggest meaning. These include the use of an exclamation mark or question mark drawn by itself in a speech-bubble. These suggest surprise, astonishment or excitement, as in frame 5 of the *Famous Five* story and frame 4 of *Canardo*, depending upon the context and the individual reading. In most of the readings the students had picked up the signification at the point on the continuum between arbitrary word and arbitrary punctuation mark.

Moving along the continuum the systems change from an arbitrary punctuation mark to the iconic depiction of objects that have a direct representational relationship to

their meaning. This could be seen to parallel the relationship between the word and its referent. The icon can also be used as a symbol as with the use of the skeletal tree in *Canardo*, frame 1. It therefore has a similar function to the metaphorical use of language. For example in *Going West* there is the foregrounded skull. This symbolises the dangers of the environment for the people on the wagon train, which is positioned in the back plane. The icon can also become an arbitrary sign, as stars can represent being knocked on the head.

To summarise, the continuum model runs from arbitrary word signs to arbitrary image signs. An example of the use of the word ‘skull’ and its associated imagery can be used to illustrate this:

- ‘Skull’ as arbitrary linguistic signifier; the simile ‘skull-like’ to create imagery;
- the onomatopoeic ‘bonk’ for the sound of the skull being hit;
- neologisms such as ‘aargh’ to show metaphorically the reaction of the skull being hit;
- the arbitrary sign ‘\*\*\*’ to signify the effect of being hit on the skull;
- the iconic representation of a skull as part of a skeleton;
- the iconic representation of a skull as metaphor for death or danger;
- the use of the icon skull as arbitrary sign on a flag to signify ‘pirate’

The position on the continuum, from arbitrary linguistic signifier to arbitrary iconic signifier, depends not only upon the signifying system, but also the use that is being made of the particular sign at the time in the text, but this does not deny that it has to have a combination of uses, therefore it can be both iconic and metaphorical. Both are possible simultaneously.

We can take another example from the analysis of the data discussed in the previous chapter. In text D Judge Dredd is seen coming through a door to inspect the kitchens. Violence is signified by the image. As pair 5 state, [D5, 14] “pushing barging door open - barges in”, but they do not directly reference the word ‘crash’, which is positioned next to the door. This pair appeared not to reach the critical

point of understanding for this text and if they read them did not use the words. In contrast the word and the implication of volume and sound behind its design are referenced to the action in the picture by pair 4 [D4, 6] “Judge Dredd walking through door with big crash.” The linguistic signifier ‘crash’ is also referred to by pair 7 in conjunction with a description of the iconic action, [D7, 29] “What are they doing they are crashing through a door.” This again references the sound that is evoked by the way the word crash has been designed. The other A level pair actually refer directly to the word and the image, [D8, 90-92] “he’s actually, the door is flies open, actually the words ‘crash’ written on there, and he’s standing tall and he’s looking upset ...” None of the pairs refer directly to the graphic design of the word or the exclamation mark but they imply it in their interpretation of the frame. This brief example shows the relationship, the ties or connections, between depiction (the image) and description (the word) which are read almost, if not actually, simultaneously, and their different uses. This relationship can also be seen in the mapping.

The continuum model is useful for understanding the way that the different signifying systems interact and therefore help to explain how the comic language works. It does not explain the process. It allow for overlap or links between the systems but not idiosyncratic responses from individual readers that cannot be located along the continuum, such as the LSS student’ remarks. In other words the meaning being generated can only be described as being at one point in the process of reading. The word ‘**CRASH!**’ can be an arbitrary signifier, figuratively onomatopoeic and metaphorical, an arbitrary sign for noise and through its design an iconic representation of the sound of a crash at the same time. In the continuum model its position would be dependent upon the use being made of the sign at a particular moment and by a particular reader. This may involve the use of all the possibilities within the reader, perhaps simultaneously. The continuum model, although useful for textual analysis does not provide a sufficient model for understanding the overall process of how readers read comics.



## The Paradigm or Framework Model<sup>5</sup>

In the paradigm or framework model there are certain frames of knowledge that are deemed necessary for understanding a text. In the case of the graphic text, the knowledges that are needed broadly include:

- the knowledge of the linguistic system
- the knowledge of iconic representation
- the knowledge of the specific conventions of the graphic form, such as lines, speech bubbles and frames
- the knowledge of narrative structure, such as cause and effect, manipulation of time and space
- The knowledge of general cultural and inter-textual connections

This model is based upon the work of cognitive psychologists who have shown that any description of a text must “take into account the role of an intelligent and informed interpreter. It also suggests that perceived structures will be different for different readers, depending on what knowledge schemas are triggered and what their content might be.” (Graddol, *et al*, 1987, p. 205; J. Merritt, 1969)

Thus where the schemas are not implemented or where there are gaps in knowledge or where only partial information has been given, it can explain a breakdown of understanding even with competent readers. For example, the *Manga* comics or the *Judge Dredd* comics may initially be difficult to read even for someone who has been a very competent reader of other types of complex graphic book forms, such as *Asterix* (Bradman, ‘Asterix and his Creators’, 1981; Hockridge, ‘Trix of the Trade’, 1981). This is because there are significant differences in the form and style. The framework of knowledge of the text has to be built up into a certain competency so that it can be accessed and referred to by the reader.

At particular points within a text one level of knowledge may dominate. In order fully to comprehend a text all frameworks must work interactively. Where there are

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<sup>5</sup> I have taken this framework partly from Minsky (1975)

gaps in knowledge they can possibly be filled by reference between the various frames of knowledge. Gina and Beverley have used their knowledge of *Famous Five* stories in their reading. [B7, 38-9] “B I’ve got a good idea what the narrative is here then/G It was the Famous Five ...” Martin and Ben’s misreading of this text is connected with the fact that they do not have or do not access cultural knowledge of the *Famous Five*. [B8] They also do not link the framework of cause and effect, the narrative structure between the frames and the parallel stories, by using the written text. For example between lines 48, “B then OK then we cut up somewhere else and line 65, M cut a long way,” the discussion falters on Ben trying to understand and to convey to Martin the change in setting. Eventually after Ben has described the frame, Martin states, “so where they are now is not important but what they are saying is.” [80] It is by using the linguistic framework that he has understood the narrative. The readers in the study who were able to make more effective sense of the texts appeared to use all the frameworks of knowledges. In contrast readers who did not work in each of these frameworks, even if apparently unsuccessfully, were the ones who often failed to reach the critical point.

The less competent readers would refer to concrete personal experience apart from the text, and therefore outside the particular paradigms of narrative structure, signifying systems and cultural references within the text. Often this type of comment would make it difficult to link back into the narrative frameworks. One example of this was Chris, the LSS student who commented, “gypsy only have caravans they’ve stolen” when he saw the wagon train. This effectively stopped the understanding of the text for the listener as this personal framework was only tangentially linked to the narrative.

This model with its overlapping structures has therefore many advantages over the continuum model for understanding the total process of reading in that it allows for references that are not specific to the text. It shows how a reader will move between frames dynamically in order to build up on each framework that has been accessed for relevant information, as Jim and James did (Appendix 8, figure 8.6). These frameworks of knowledges are necessary but not a sufficient explanation for the

process of reading and understanding the graphic text, as having knowledge does not automatically create understanding.

### **The Core and Periphery Spiral Model<sup>6</sup>**

If we take a three-dimensional model, which comes from external boundaries (peripheral orbits) and spirals inward to a core, there is the opportunity to look at the process of reading graphic texts as one that can incorporate aspects of both of the other models. It provides a more versatile structure, one that includes the idea of different knowledges, and therefore accommodates the use of words, images and the concept of context and ‘tradition’.<sup>7</sup> It allows for signs having different functions at different points in the text as in a linear model. It also provides for continuous movement between (spiral) the various signifying systems (orbits) to build up meaning cumulatively as well as in circularity and therefore has a three-dimensional characteristic.

In this model the knowledges of the various symbol systems, and textual and intertextual knowledges, lie within the peripheral orbits of the core. These orbits are not totally fixed points nor isolated. Metaphorically this model looks like a series of orbital routes from which you can slip via connecting links from one to the other, “winding continually about.”<sup>8</sup> As in the previous model there are knowledges, which are necessary for understanding, but ‘literal’ possession of these knowledges may not lead to understanding of the narrative. A reader can keep moving around the orbital routes without moving towards the core of understanding. The LSS students (Appendix 8, figures 8.1 and 8.2) knew the framework of the comic form and understood what the pictures showed. They were aware of the genre of the story and could read the written text when encouraged. It was found that these frameworks of knowledge and use of individual signs did not necessarily lead to

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of spiral here follows the definition of “winding continually about and constantly receding from or moving towards a centre”. (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1976)

<sup>7</sup> Gadamer in Usher, (1995)

<sup>8</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1976).

comprehension of the narrative. Similarly with Mark and Ben's reading of the *Famous Five* story (Appendix 8, figure 8.4) there was understanding of what the pictures showed and the words were accurately read. It can be seen from their reading map that the critical point of understanding was not reached. They had the necessary information but this was not sufficient for them to enter into the core and reach the critical point. If they had it would have enabled them to move out and access other routes or frameworks. If you compare this with the map of pair 7 (Appendix 8, figure 8.7) you can see the difference. Here the switching between the words and pictures create the points of inference that build up to the critical point and then link back to the other knowledges.

The question which is immediately raised is: what did the pairs who reached the critical point, need to move inward towards the core? It seemed that understanding came through two main routes. Firstly, the structure of the narrative and the type of story and characters. These were peripheral orbit points and were obtained through information from the images and the text. Secondly, through the transfer of meaning between the literal and the inferred levels that moved understanding into a point nearer to the core through a connecting route. This also required relay or switching between codes but at a higher plane that generated meaning through textual coherence. If the reader had moved around the spiral through these peripheral points into the centre, or core, they were able to spiral outward again and make further connections between the various knowledges within the different orbits. This then provided the reader with new access routes back into the core.

The core and spiral periphery model provides a structure that allows for a hierarchy of knowledge. The critical difference between this and the framework model is that it is not one that is built upon but one in which the structures and knowledges are articulated to each other. This is therefore not a rigid and static model, where the next level cannot be entered without a full complement of information. It allows for the affective or imaginative response of the reader. As in the continuum model, it allows for different types of information to be extracted at different points in the reading, depending upon the system and the way that it is read. It allows for recognising pictures (depiction) and understanding words (description). It also

allows for both literal and metaphorical uses of the same symbol both in iconic and linguistic form so that what is shown, depicted or described can also be metaphorically construed. We recognise words, such as 'aargh', and understand pictures such as the metaphorical use of the leafless tree in frame 1 of text C. Logically both routes must be possible simultaneously.

It allows for the reader to determine when to move nearer to the core, which can be at the beginning, middle or end as we can see with the maps. It allows for the individual's understanding and searching for meaning in different frameworks of knowledge. It allows for moving forwards and backwards around the orbits, but also in and out from core to periphery and vice versa at each point of the reading process.

An example of this model applied to a reading [C7] can be found in Appendix 8, figure 8.7. First we move around the structure of the page, "the first page consists of six frames. The first frame, the largest..." Then we move into the images "a house, a dog, with a brown satchel ..." from there the suggested meaning and imaginative response to the images "fairly old house, quite spooky" and then we move out to pick up the words and to use the comic signifying system (thought bubble) "he's saying, well thinking, guess this must be the doctor's house." The reading carries on moving between the signifying systems until line 17. Here there is a movement into the core with an inference made from the reading so far, "probably means that this wolf is house breaker." This certainly explains his actions if not the cause. The reading moves back into the periphery area to read the images and words, until line 31. Here, with the suggestion that Ferdinand is on the run, we move back towards the core. In the continuing movement the reading goes towards the centre and outwards when understanding has been thwarted. So for example in line 62, Gina says, "oh hang on . . The wolf I'm not too sure ..." but then moves forward when she provides a possible reading of the image, "I don't know, if he's drunk or not." The frame containing the image of the dog with a device in his head moves them back in towards the core as this justifies the action of the intruder. The final frame confirms that there is something horrific, and again moves them towards the core. Finally, Beverley moves into the core, "right I was going to say it sound

like a private investigator going into a ...” revealing understanding and that the critical point has been reached.

## Discussion

In any reading there are certain areas that have to be taken into account; these include the context, the text and the reader. Rosenblatt discusses this (1978) as does Freund in *The Return of the Reader* (1987). There is a constant dynamic tension and dialogue between the text and the reader in literature. This obviously changes with the type of text that is being read and the context in which it is read. There is no master switch which as a researcher one can flick from text to reader and access all the processes by which meaning is being generated within the reader. Therefore in order to discuss these processes and the meanings generated we have to develop a metalanguage to talk about the language in between text and reader. The maps and the models are forms of metalanguage that have been used here to understand how readers read comics. It has been necessary to try to pick apart a holistic activity using evidence that must inevitably be partial and from situations that are contrived. There are both readers of the text and audiences creating meaning through both knowledge and experience. It thus means that the interpretation of the responses must be understood to have been filtered through various conceptual frameworks and particular methodologies.

Another factor is that the very richness and ‘indeterminacy’<sup>9</sup> of a text denies a total, complete reading, both objectively as a deconstruction exercise and subjectively as a reader’s response. Often the reader indicated meaning maybe through tone of voice, or a pause, but did not externalise their thought process and so access was denied.

Instrumentally there are certain types of knowledge, such as word recognition, which provide one connecting route into the core of understanding. Other knowledges are the type of text as well as the type of story and inter-textual references. In text B,

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<sup>9</sup> Hartman, quoted in Freund. 1987. p. 155

the knowledge of the *Famous Five* meant that the A level pair 7 were able to reconstruct this narrative quite quickly and efficiently. They had experience of the type (generic inter-textual relay) of story in which these characters are usually situated. In contrast, the conversation of pair 8 revealed much wandering around, as if they were in a maze, although they eventually extricated themselves. Similarly the GCSE pair 4 were able to make sense of the second half of text D because they knew the character Judge Dredd. The other GCSE pair made little sense of the text, showing no understanding of the characters involved or little interest or motivation in trying to make sense of the text.

The knowledge of how to read these texts and their specific codes were also part of competent reading strategies. In order to create understanding elements, such as the order of the frames and the knowledge of the conventions of marks, such as speed lines, were all part of the knowledge that was necessary to understand the form of the comic. This knowledge meant that the readers used both depiction and description in the same signs to relay between the two systems. It was also part of the reading strategy to know when to focus on the text and when to focus on the pictures for information. It was the readers who appeared to scan the pages whilst attempting to read moving forward and backwards through the text assessing and weighing the evidence from the different codes, who provided the most coherent readings. It was also the competent readings that revealed that various signifying systems had been used to support the inferences and helped the students to reach the critical point of understanding. This can be clearly seen in the maps such as figure 8.11 in Appendix 8.

In summary:

- In the comic it is possible to both depict and describe in the same sign and over the whole text.
- Textual coherence relies upon depiction and description at the level of the diegesis.
- Readers require certain types of knowledge, such as linguistic, visual and cultural knowledge in order to access different routes to understanding texts.

- Readers also require certain intermediate reading skills.
- The process of switching between the images and texts to make narrative coherence is one of these intermediate skills.
- This works through routes of depiction and description which convey meaning simultaneously or almost so.
- These processes working through the affective responses help readers to reach the critical point, the core understanding, from which the text can be understood.
- This process can best be understood through the core and spiral periphery model.

## Conclusion

As a more systematic study was undertaken of the similarities and differences that emerged in the ways in which texts were read, it appeared that some of the assumptions about reading graphic texts were clearly going to be challenged. These are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, but to summarise the two main positions: first, that pictures are easy to read and that therefore reading comics harms literacy and even leads to illiteracy;<sup>10</sup> and in contrast to this argument the idea that a combination of images and texts helps early and less able readers to understand the narrative structure and therefore aids literacy.<sup>11</sup> In their own way both theories are based upon the assumption that the comic's combination of text with image makes the act of reading in some way easier. The analysis of a variety of readings over a range of texts proved this assumption to be too simplistic. It points to evidence that shows that the act of reading a comic requires many forms of literacy and an active response by the reader.

This completes the field research part of this study. The following chapter and final section explores how the signifying systems and their use by readers are important in understanding literacy, and how this research relates to action in the classroom.

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, Orwell, (1946); Pumphrey, (1955)

<sup>11</sup> Krashen (1987)



## Chapter 9

# Oracy,<sup>1</sup> Visual and Verbal Literacy : The Educational Context

“And what is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”  
(*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Chapter 1, Lewis Carroll 1982)

## Introduction

Alice's question implies many others. It highlights the issues that underlie the on-going discussions around literacy, particularly within the educational context. What is the definition of literacy to be used in the classroom? Is it merely to do with written text or do we include the spoken word and visual literacy? Are there different styles of literacy within these different forms? Is there a hierarchy of forms of literacy? Could the comic link into all of these systems with its particular style and form? Is this part of the pleasure of the text? Does the reading of comics indicate illiteracy? Is there any educational use for the form?

The debates around definitions of written literacy, as was noted in the literature review in Chapter 3, are frequently ideologically weighted and shift as the literacy goal-posts are moved for social, political or cultural reasons. Similarly weighted is the question of the hierarchy between visual, verbal, oral and other forms of literacy which appear in many discipline areas and are the basis of education policy. There is also the debate as to how each of these systems can be ascribed rules, structures, arrangements and thus be seen as formal systems.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ong refers to orality to indicate the link with literacy

<sup>2</sup> See Allen, D. (1994) for a discussion on the development of visual literacy in the National Curriculum.

## Oracy, Visual and Verbal Literacy

These literacies, which directly or indirectly use words together form part of our complex communication systems. Different understandings require critical but comparable metalinguistic skills. In most 'literate' societies<sup>3</sup> the emergent reader will usually first be introduced to narrative through visual and oral forms of storytelling. These forms allow for a looser reading style compared to the linearity of prose. The narrative or meaning may be conveyed through rhythm and style in the oral form, as in nursery rhymes and poems, or in a discourse of visual interpretation with pictures, rather than through the order of particular words. As Ong (1982) indicated, orality (Bruner's enactive mode) indicates a different mindset and purpose; "performance of an oral epic ... can serve simultaneously as an act of celebration, as *paedeia* or education for youth, as a strengthener of group identity ... and much else." (ibid. p. 161)

In the visual form meaning, as in the picture book, is conveyed through a holistic design and is not necessarily affected by the specific order or the accuracy of depiction. Images (Bruner's iconic mode) also have a different process of understanding. Meek said when discussing picture books:

"The relations of pictures to stories and the nature of the readers' interactions with both are an important aspect of literacy too little regarded and even less understood. Picture books are not only for children." (1991, p. 116)

## Imagination

One criticism for using pictures in texts is that they limit the imagination by tying down the options for individual interpretation. Most literary texts for adults do not have illustrations, although there are notable exceptions such as the work of William Blake. The logic of this type of criticism when applied to visual representation can

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<sup>3</sup>literate here refers to a written system, but societies without such a system are not 'illiterate'

be challenged. Perhaps one way to engage with this is to draw a parallel between listening to the 'blind' medium of radio and watching television. It is a different imaginative and cognitive process. We all create our own visual picture of *The Archers* but not of the *East Enders*. Is the latter therefore less imaginative than the former? The argument for visual literacy is that it extends beyond just looking at texts and iconic recognition (similar to word recognition) to involve an imaginative response which requires knowledges including that of the structures of the image. Texts, such as complex paintings or graphic novels, involve sophisticated concepts and metalinguistic skills. Meek talks about the way that in graphic novels "Text and pictures together create the dramatic, multi-consciousness that lies at the heart of a Shakespearean comedy or a Marx Brothers' film." (1991, p. 119) The images of *East Enders* do not limit imagination, they provide a different experience (Baron, 'Television Literacy: Curriculum in Action', 1985; Allen, R. C. Channels of Discourse, 1987; Corner and Hawthorne, Communication Studies, 1980).

The effectiveness of combining word and image is dependent upon the way that the picture captures rather than limits the imagination, and the text controls the meaning within the narrative. It is therefore not just that there are pictures rather than text, but it is the visible structuring between the two that is significant. A visual design allows the reader a more 'oral' style of reading than does a linear text even if, as Dupasquier (1992) suggests, they are heavily guided for the final order. Good design therefore provides for a progressive rather than localised frame reading (Fowler, 1977, p. 89). Criticism, which often condemns the comic as being worthless and lacking imagination, is usually about the quality of images. As with any form of text there will be those with poorly executed images or those irrelevant to the story (Nodelman, 1988, p. 278) and these are therefore sometimes counterproductive, but with a well 'written' narrative there is required from the reader a sophisticated interpretation of the metafictional devices used in the construction, and a leap of the imagination:

“there is a power in the human mind which is at work in our thoughts about what is absent; which enables us to see the world present or absent, and also to present this vision to others,” (Warnock, 1976, p. 196)

The vision of the world through the imagination requires literacy in many disguises (Charlton, *Imagination and Education*, 1967). Even where pictures are illustrative rather than constructive in narrative terms visual literacy is a pre-requisite. The classic picture book for children, which has set pieces to illustrate the story, is obviously different from their use as integral to the telling of the story. The wordless picture book is an interesting hybrid of picture book and comic. Here the pictures are drawn in a series of frames that are interconnected. Similar metafictional devices such as layout, framing, movement can be identified with those used in comics. Philippe Dumasquier, who co-authored one of the research texts, *Going West*, suggested this when discussing the way he developed wordless picture books:

“I started to develop wordless picture books more seriously, making sure there would be no place for the text by using techniques which would literally kill the words ...

The technique is very simple and largely an extension of that used in comic strips ... It also has strong connections with movies and the ways films are directed ... two pictures must fit together ... a special relationship ... but also by playing with certain lyrical stubbornness in the author, who repeated his tale ad infinitum, varying it always but sticking to its theme ... could arrive at what many critics felt was a genuine state of poetry ...” (p. 9 *Books for Keeps*, No. 74, May 1992)

Dumasquier’s fanciful idea of killing words with a wordless picture book is not sustainable. In fact they create words either in the imagination or in actual verbalisation. Jeff Hynds quotes a seven year old girl faced with a double-page wordless spread saying, “You can’t read this: there’s too many words on these pages.” (p. 7, *Books for Keeps*, No. 74) Another example of this type of book is *Rosie’s Walk* (Pat Hutchins, 1992).

The ‘inferential walks’ (Eco) that are necessary in reading such a text are echoed in Iser’s ideas of the reader having ‘to image’ the gap between the ‘schematised views’ and their object in written texts, “Thus the reader’s imagination is left free to paint in the scene ... the reader begins to uncover what we might call the virtual dimension ...” (Iser, 1974, pp. 38-43)

By taking an example from the transcripts we can see this ‘imaging’ as the readers walk around the text and make inferences using the different signifying systems.

*Figure 9.1 Gina and Beverley are discussing **Canardo** [C7, 119-128]*

G “And the patch over his eye that’s quite	image implies inference of character suggests affective response
B “yeh	support and agreement of inference
G “We know his name’s Kartler	re-cap of words - information
B “He’s still getting into the house to try to free the people? (Ho) as well so other’s have had this so maybe someone he knows in the house	construction of meaning from the words and images; inference of the cause of the action in the frame from knowledge framework of previous narratives
G “So what do you think’s going on when he looks quite shocked when he says ‘son of a bitch’, he must have seen something like sort of quite disturbing or something	collaborative questioning reference to words and images, inferences from both signifying systems. Response suggests empathy. Relay between depiction and description
B “yeh don’t know fighting someone who knows what’s going on don’t know	inference of reasons for action, and cause of reaction
G “those sound effects are quite queer”	neologisms and onomatopoeic words imply disturbance and imaginative response

In their discussion you can see half-formed ideas being tossed around between the pair and then confirmed or rejected. Gina begins with the signifier of the patch and obviously suggests that it has specific connotations, which are not externalised but imply an affective response, she presents this vision through words and tone of voice. Beverley is happy to take up the implied suggestion. Then Gina references the linguistic code, giving the name of a character. Beverley moves from these two pieces of evidence provided from the visual and written codes which Gina has posed as enigmas, to summarise the action of the extract. She also gathers the implication through the words that the presence of the intruder (who is Ferdinand the hero) is known. Gina picks up the interrogative tone set by Beverley. She asks another question, and tries to provide evidence from the words (what he says) and pictures (how he looks) to answer the question (what he saw). Their inferential walks, the switching between the images, the words, the propositions and the narrative are clearly seen. Its competency is revealed in the final two lines of their discussion:

[C7, 132-3]

B “yeh dog private eye investigate something to do with brain washing of  
some description,

G “OK”

Visual design can lead to alternative ways of reading, perhaps a more oral, or as Dupasquier claims a poetic style. The individual reader is able to control which part of the information to decode in which order, more so than with a linear text. When reading any text there will be references forward and backward. Some will be small, maybe to check syntax within a sentence, others will be larger for thematic meaning. Research into how readers read poems (Benton *et al*, 1988) clearly shows how a reader will move forward and backwards to develop a personal understanding and response to this specific form. Movement around the text, if for different purposes, was evident in the reading of the comic extracts. Mark and Ben’s [D4] reading of *Judge Dredd* (Figure 8.8; Appendix 6) shows how they move around the text mosaically, picking up pieces of information from the various signifying systems to build narrative. This movement is partly to do with the design of the layout, but also

partly to do with their reading strategies. Their discussion, and therefore observed personal response, is limited to short, staccato phrases which is perhaps linked to their ability or willingness to vocalise their thoughts.

*Figure 9.2 Mark and Dan [D4] GCSE*

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| 1. "Street rubbish                                  | (frame 1)        |
| 2. Next frame a bug looking at us                   | (frame 2)        |
| 3. Cockroach going towards others as if trouble     | (frames 5 and 3) |
| 4. violence   | (frame 6)        |
| 5. title frame                                      | (frame 5)        |
| 6. Judge Dredd                                      | (frame 6)        |
| 7. Two people behind looking through with big crash | (frame 6)        |
| 8. two people behind look like bouncers             | (frame 6)        |
| 9. he puts fingers on table and lifts liquid        | (frames 7/8)     |
| 10. stuff on it                                     | (frame 8)        |
| 11. what kind of                                    | (frame 9)        |
| 12. Judge Dredd looking at cook                     | (frame 9)        |
| 13. What kind of soup are you making Pal - Dandruff | (frame 9)        |
| 14. Get a hat on                                    | (frame 9)        |
| 15. Obviously Dandruff going in soup                | (frame 9)        |
| 16. These guys aren't bouncers - they're waiters    | (frame 6)        |
| 17. stuff behind doors"                             | (frame 6)        |

What we must not assume is that because a picture is provided with the written text it immediately cuts off 'indeterminacy' or the use of the imagination and has a simple and obvious meaning to all readers. If we take an alternative view suggested by Nodelman, it is the indeterminacy or ambiguity of a picture which has to be rooted by the written word. As Rosenblatt affirmed, reading of any text is a transaction, a process rather than a product (see pp. 33-47 in Cooper, 1985). Rosenblatt was referring to written forms, but the concept can be applied to all forms of texts. The assumption that low levels of literacy skills are required in the process of reading images in comics and more recently in viewing films, television, videos and the

Internet have tended to allow the debate to flounder on the rocks of media effects on written literacy. Any model which deals with a simple encoding and decoding format assumes that the message content is only governed by the sender's conscious intentions (Wagner, 'When Literacy isn't Reading (and Vice Versa)', 1982). It also assumes that the message will reach the receiver without interruption or discontinuity. The basis of this model is that the receiver will decode the message in its intended order and meaning.<sup>4</sup> As was seen with this research, where the message had little resonance for the reader or where they had no framework for understanding the message, it could be totally ignored. At the least it provided only a stepping-stone to another meaning paradigm (see [D5] for example). Often the message was re-worked by the students to provide alternative more personal narratives as with Text A with the LSS students. There were also sometimes subversive readings to the narratives, for example with Text D and the A level students. As has been shown with other texts and audience readings, there can be dominant, partial and alternative styles of reading.

There is perhaps the danger of losing the narrative thread if the ellipses are too large or enigmatic for the level of reading skills, or if the knowledge frameworks are not accessible. This difficulty was clearly illustrated in the links between the parallel stories in text B and the story taken from two perspectives in text D. Here, even the competent readers were presented with difficulties in comprehending the extracts. The textual surface structure must convey a total as well as a localised frame reading. In this way the narrative has coherence that is re-constructed by the reader and through which they reach the critical point for understanding.<sup>5</sup> Often readers who have miscued in reading have not understood the narrative structure. For example, not making the connection between the rain storm and the swollen river washing away the bridge in *Going West*, or not realising that a particular narrative viewpoint was being used in *Judge Dredd*. Movements between frames and sequencing become not only a single schema but also part of the syntagm, and have a narrative effect. As Neisser stated, "we cannot perceive unless we anticipate, but we

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<sup>4</sup> Barthes' structuralist model would consider the way this creates ideological meanings

<sup>5</sup> There have been many theorists who have analysed the structure of narratives, including Propp (1968), Barthes, (1977) and Genette (1980).



must not see only what we anticipate” (Nodelman, 1988, p.176). The ‘stereotype’ and ‘script’ are only the beginning of the process. The pictures, by manipulation of the reader's assumptions about context, about possibilities, about inferences, through association, can move the narrative forward or hold up the reader. That is they involve the hermeneutic and the proiaretic of Roland Barthes’ five codes. Perhaps this is neatly summed up in the metaphor suggested by the two phrases concrete picture (Iser, 1974) and concrete poetry (Twyman, 1987). The former holds us with the information, whilst the latter flows to establish a new equilibrium.

In the structure of the comic there is an inbuilt system, developed through experiment with design, which controls meaning of images and narrative by the size, shape, border and order of the frames. Additionally there are other conventions and metafictional devices such as arrows and linking bubbles. As Genette (1980) pointed out:

“In other forms of narrative expressions such as the roman-photo or the comic strip (or a pictorial strip, like the predella of Urbino or an embroidered strip, like the 'tapestry' of Queen Matilda), which while making up sequences of images and thus requiring a successive or diachronic reading also lend themselves to, and even invite, a kind of global and synchronic look - or at least a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images ... the size and shape of each picture, you can control the story even further ... You can also give a sense of timing to the story by putting different sizes of picture in a certain order or by creating a pattern with it.” (in Books for Keeps, No.74, May 1992).

The style of reading of a comic therefore is in some ways analogous to the oracy required to understand how a narrative is ‘told’. Time and order are controlled by the frames which may be controlled by the reader and not by the teller. The text in a comic is also elliptical with a strong emphasis upon visual layout and other metafictional devices as well as ‘oral’ metalinguistic skills. Sartre indicated this link between the forms of communication which require different decoding skills:

“... poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture and music ... The art of prose is employed in discourse; its substance is by nature significative; that is, the words are first of all not objects but designations for objects ...” (Jean-Paul Sartre in Warnock, 1976, p. 196)

Similarly McLuhan felt that once prose becomes a literary form the literate man “undergoes much separation of his imaginative, emotional, and sense life.” (1964, p. 88) Ong suggested that “though words are grounded in oral speech, writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever.” (1982, p. 12) Both imply a loss to the imagination. In the comic the words, especially dialogue, are often ‘spoken’ through the design and graphics of speech bubbles which suggest an oral representation of speech rather than a written, grammatically controlled representation. Given its use of non-linear visual and linear verbal for narrative, the comic form can be seen to be a link between the oral, the poetic, the word and the image in its means of communication and the connections it makes between the various codes (Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction Contemporary Poetics, 1983).

Eco (1994) in his discussion of ‘The World of Charlie Brown’ talks about the poetic nature of the comic strip:

“In *Krazy Kat* (1910-1944, George Herriman) the poetry originated from a certain lyrical stubbornness in the author, who repeated his tale *ad infinitum*, varying it always but sticking to its theme. It was thanks only to this that the mouse’s arrogance, the dog’s unrewarded compassion, and the cat’s desperate love could arrive at what many critics felt was a genuine state of poetry, an uninterrupted elegy based on sorrowing innocence. In a comic of this sort. . . discover the possibility of a purely allusive world, a pleasure of a ‘musical’ nature, an interplay of feelings that were not banal.” (Eco, 1994)

Eco’s statement above indicated that the more ‘poetic’ and holistic reading of a comic requires a process of both iconic recognition and a linguistic structure. As we

use words to describe a picture we inevitably use a cognitive plan that will structure our reading through such schema as narrative codes. McLuhan, with reference to the movie, talks about the way that we are moving back from the world of print to the iconic mode, thus moving from the lineal to the configuration, “We return to the inclusive form of the icon.” (1964, p.12) Today’s new technology and interactive systems mean that the need for visual literacy, including the use of icon and spatial factors, may be new imperatives for literacy. Alternatively Eco claims that we need more verbal literacy not less as more information is put into print.

### **The Educational Context**

Literacy may cover many forms and styles of texts and communication. In all forms it is the text re-created through a combination of the signifying systems and the imagination of the reader that gives understanding and pleasure. This process can be seen in the half-formed thoughts and ideas revealed in the transcribed readings and the discussions of the students in this study. In education the emphasis and weight are often more on the end product in terms of comprehension and literacy (that is the ability to be well-read and to read well) rather than on understanding the process by which understanding was created. We also tend to compartmentalise activities rather than to build upon skills. The skill of parallel processing distributed over multiple threads developing simultaneously is one which is exercised in a variety of reading activities including reading comics. These have to be understood synoptically, developing an ability to read subtle signs in the narrative and in a variety of structures, which requires quite sophisticated skills and experience. Comics *per se* are not therefore necessarily useful with the inexperienced reader, but they are useful as one of the ways in which readers are encouraged to practise and develop different reading skills and knowledge about texts.

As important as the cognitive and metacognitive process set within a social context is the personal response of the reader. The assumption that pictures, picture books and comics are easy to read and will aid early readers of written texts masks the real need for literacy education in many different forms, including visual and aural, to aid

the imaginative recall, response and interpretation of a text. A reader does not only need to be able to decode signs. They need to be able to transfer or translate between codes, that is between different semiotic systems. They need knowledge of how texts work and a schema that will initiate the structural cues for each text they read. Essential for comprehension are cultural and other paradigmatic references. The linkage of ideas requires imagination and knowledge of affective behaviour in responding to a text. The process of understanding texts thus requires skills, knowledge and imagination. The literacy involved within different forms of communication may be of a different style, but not of a different quality. It is the role of the educator to mediate these through a range of texts. As Warnock stated in her seminal book on the imagination:

“in education we have a duty to educate the imagination above all else. For we use imagination in our ordinary perceptions of the world. This perception cannot be separated from interpretation.” (1976, p. 20)

This perhaps makes the link between the processes of perception, affection and cognition in which the “affective acts continuously on cognitive semiotic processes,” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 37) more important to highlight in understanding literacy, if we are not to fall into an instrumentalist mode of thinking about literacy.

## **Conclusion**

In this final part of the study I have indicated how the study of reading comics has a relevance to the way that we think about literacy in education. It suggests that we should have an inclusive rather than exclusive view on the texts that readers use, and that a variety of texts, including comics, which involve different styles of literacy can provide important understanding of, and skills for, reading for meaning.

## Chapter 10

### **Conclusion: Reading Comics: Theory and Practice**

One of the questions posed at the beginning of this study was whether comics and education are mutually exclusive. This study offers, through a systematic investigation, a possible answer to that question by helping to understand the complex process of reading a comic and thus highlighting its potential use in teaching reading and understanding narrative. In doing this it also contributes to the ongoing debates around different forms of literacy.

The research question emerged from the articulation of educational context, teaching practice and theories around texts, reading styles and definitions of literacy. In an age where literacy and being literate are increasingly slippery concepts and the centre of political strategies, the focus on the process of reading required an understanding of the contexts in which literacy is set, as well as the process by which literacy is achieved. In this popular memory, which may be excluded from official categories because it is oppositional (Foucault) to dominant taste, has its place with reference to the reading of comics. In this study I focused upon the reader (as with writing, reading also constructs identity) and the text, rather than the text as conveyor of messages. But as with any other text it cannot ignore the point that the comic is a means for ideological positioning and therefore open to critical discourse analysis. The literacy perspective, which was mainly taken in this study, allowed me to set the study within the broader frameworks of the powerful discourses that position us as readers of texts and consumers of culture, whilst the reading perspective allowed me to focus on the processes involved in reading comics.

I have therefore explored some of the issues around the use of comics in education, centring on the question of literacy and whether different types of literacy have equal value. The focus has been on the process of reading and for this purpose I chose to use a case study approach which would allow comparisons to be made across a range of reading abilities.

The evidence here about reading has appeared and been interpreted within the discourse of knowledge and experience of the teacher/researcher. Previous work has shown the ambivalent attitude towards the use of comics in an educational context. This study has acknowledged these attitudes. The research is itself not value-free and there are limitations, which are discussed in earlier chapters, such as the research data being partial and small-scale with a subjective choice of texts. Other factors include the situations that were set up in ‘natural’ surroundings but with the unnatural act of reading a comic aloud, and the wide range of abilities (Hopkins, A Teacher’s Guide to Classroom Research, 1985).

### **What has been contributed by this study?**

One contribution has been to take some of the myths surrounding the reading of comics and to test their assumptions. Although, as already mentioned, there has been much written about the comic from various perspectives, such as the history, the art and the sociology of comics (Eisner, 1989, Comics and Sequential; Baxendale, 1989, On Comedy: The Beano and Ideology; Jones, ‘From Superman to Swamp Thing’, 1990; Nokes, ‘Vile Jelly’, 1994; Hasted, ‘Strange Customs’, 1996) most of the little that has been written about the way a comic is read is based upon beliefs rather than empirical evidence. One aim of this study was therefore to consider some of the generalised statements made about comics and literacy and gauge these against particular readings. The evidence produced has contributed a challenge to the popular belief that images are easier to read than text; and thus by extension, that their combination makes such texts as comics easy reading and should therefore be used only with early or weak readers. It provides evidence on the way that readers process the information from different signifying systems, between depiction and description, and the requirement of certain intermediate skills and knowledges within the reader. It confirms that certain skills are required to read comics and that certain knowledges, such as how narratives work, how the frame and ellipsis integrate in the comic form and how images are constructed internally, are also required.

A second contribution was in revealing the variety of reading styles and positions taken up by individual readers. There was no monolithic reading strategy. By using a range of abilities with texts suitable to each level, I was able to compare the similarities and differences of reading across these levels. If the assumption is that images would help the weaker readers to comprehend a narrative, given a suitable level of text, then a fair corollary would be that the reading success across the range of texts for the specific groups of readers would be similar. That is the weaker readers would be as successful in reading as the more advanced readers within their own range of texts. The evidence from this study of readers showed that perhaps as important, if not more important than skills in decoding were other factors. These were the individuals' knowledge of texts, their ability to externalise imaginative thoughts, their ability to synthesise through cognitive frameworks such elements as cultural and social information, and finally their semiotic experience of visual as well as written codes. They needed to know the vocabulary and grammar of each of the languages as well as of narrative structure, and this knowledge could not be assumed. In other words the form that combined words and pictures to tell a story was not inherently easier to read. Thus, whilst analysing the comic texts and comic language, it became clear that the literacy levels required to read this form could involve quite sophisticated metalinguistic skills. Therefore, the use of comics with low achievers based upon the assumption that they were easy reading might be counter-productive without intensive preparatory work.

A third contribution of this study was the understanding that a purely taxonomic profile of reading success was insufficient. This is illustrated in the idea of a critical point being reached. In reading a multi-signified text it adds a further dimension to the understanding of literacy. It suggests that we require both cognitive skills and affective knowledge for meaning and response to a text. If we focus on one to the detriment of the other we can seriously hamper reading, communication and understanding. It suggests that this critical point is also partly constructed by the text through cohesion and coherence. The concepts of cohesion and coherence are not new to the understanding of reading, but their use within a wider framework of literacy involving visual forms, which includes comics, may be. These elements are

also dependent upon other factors, such as socio-cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions, the social semiotic, which help to provide the basis for the individual's process in meaning in order to reach the critical point of understanding.

## **Future research**

I have divided possible future research into three areas. These are: the actors or readers; the text that they are reading; and finally the practices involved in teaching literacy.

Readers: This study used a limited number of subjects and it would be possible to develop a broader perspective using larger numbers of subjects. The particular methods employed would need to be altered to suit a large scale study. It would also be possible to investigate a smaller number of readers and research their personal literacy in much more depth, through various discourses and media, to give a profile of visual and verbal literacy of an individual. This could be achieved with different levels of reading ability to compare different readers' profiles. It would be necessary to consider the level and range of reading ability to be used in any study. In order to elicit more of the 'hidden' information on the readings there is the possibility of discussing texts within small focus groups so that readers would be more explicit in their verbalising of the narratives.

Texts: The limiting of structural devices by specially designing graphic pages to control semiotic references would facilitate more effective cross-referencing of studies over a range of abilities. This would enable generalisations to be made about reading strategies that are only speculative at the moment. It would be possible to investigate in more detail the metafictional devices which transfer between systems. This would link the readings to the design more directly by controlling elements and grading difficulty.



In their work Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) discuss Barthes' concept of relay but suggest that the visual part of a text is independently organised and although connected to the text, not dependent upon it, and vice versa:

“We take the view that language and visual communication both realize the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but that each does so by means of its own specific forms, and independently.” (p.17)

They consider the composition of the image and reading paths taken by readers as they read an image. These reading paths can be compared indirectly with that of the reading maps in this study which similarly track the reader across a text. The composition of an image includes for Kress and van Leeuwen informational elements placed within the zones of the image; the salient factors, which attract the reader to a particular meaning; and the framing both inter and intra the image that integrates the representational and interactive elements (p.183). They make mention of the cartoon in linear and non-linear composition (p. 218) but do not extend this to the comic, so this form of understanding the grammar of design is another possible area of future research with the comic text.

Practices: The work undertaken with the LSS students as part of the pilot project indicated that direct intervention by teaching visual literacy skills provided them with a wider vocabulary and comprehension of texts. For example, one of the tasks given to them was to draw their own comic story. This was done at the beginning and at the end of the teaching period undertaken with this group. By comparing the comic stories from the two ends of the period the improvement in design, layout and narrative was clearly seen. A ‘before and after’ study would establish if there was also a comparable improvement in literacy, perhaps measured through reading levels, with this type of teaching strategy. Other teaching strategies such as those suggested by Roux (1970) which develop precision, observation and imagination are possible study areas that could be similarly researched. Are there transferable skills and knowledge?

## Reflections - Comics in Education

Learning is not a neat and tidy assembly of interlocking blocks of knowledge but a system of cross referencing and connections that builds up and explodes onto other levels of understanding. This research similarly began with a variety of input, questions and ideas many of which arose from the voices of the students with whom I was working. Their own identities and affective responses did not necessarily coincide with the official responses that I was expecting. In reflecting in this conclusion upon the process of research and the findings which emerged there are certain key points to re-emphasise. The research emerged from the experience of using comics in practical and educational contexts. Its relevance to the work of teaching grew therefore from actually working with students in real situations. This was formalised by Roux' book which highlighted the issues and practices, but did not explain the process. It was Barthes' theory of relay that provided an initial, explanatory idea. It suggested that reading of image and text in graphic novels is done through a process of relay and is therefore fundamentally different from the process of anchorage which language imposes on free-floating images. This process of relay I feel can be best seen in the reading maps (Appendix 8). These show the switching between the different systems in diagrammatic form. The spoken words reveal that where these were successful readings this switching was working at the level of narrative coherence, or in Barthes' words, the level of the diegesis. The moment at which the whole narrative begins to make sense, that is the critical point of understanding, where imagination, knowledge and skills coalesce are connected with these points. In terms of semiotics we could say that the interpretation of the semiotics of the text is combined with the social-semiotic of unique situations and of more generalised culture contexts (Halliday). For the individual student it appeared to be their personal point of affective reality that was as significant.

The potential for complexity and richness of the comic has been seen as a suitable medium for exploring many issues in the classroom. These are illustrated by such genres as the *Crisis* comic, (Selwood, Free Expressions, 1991) polemical texts and interpretations of other literary forms. But the focus here has been on the form as a

literary event rather than the content. The research has opened up the possibility of using the comic in education in a way that will enhance work with students in building both visual and verbal literacies. It has shown assumptions in teaching based on common-sense beliefs about the cause and effect of reading comics, when put into focus by research, may not be verifiable. There are two points to make, firstly, that the values, beliefs and practices of traditional routes to literacy are being challenged, even though we are still dominated by an institutionalised understanding of literacy that still may not always accept or even acknowledge the diversity of literacy experience that bears upon reading; secondly, that the production of meaning is always affective as well as cognitive. This is why the subjective discussion of individual readings has some advantages over an objective and impersonal analysis. But the cognitive and affective are not exclusive or oppositional. Each, as revealed in the readings, provides part of the process of making meaning.

It is this combination that is illustrated by the core and spiral periphery model proposed in Chapter 8. The three-dimensional form allows for both linear and non-linear meaning to be constructed through both cognitive and imaginative frameworks.

If this study can help to reassess the usefulness of forms of texts that are non-traditional and of teaching which does not solely focus upon the cognitive demands of verbal literacy but also acknowledges other forms, it would be worth the study. If this distancing from the cognitive process in an intellectual engagement with personal experience can provide for readers the critical tools of analysis to understand and develop all forms of reading, it will serve a purpose.

Sometimes *‘du choc des idées jaillit la lumière’*.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

Pearson summarises Anderson's work on schemata:

1. Schemata provide ideational scaffolding for assimilating text information. Schemata have slots that readers expect to be filled with information in a text. Information that fills these slots is easily learned and remembered.
2. Schemata facilitate the selective allocation of attention. Put simply, schemata guide our search for what is important in a text, allowing us to separate the wheat from the chaff.
3. Schemata enable inferential elaboration. No text is ever fully explicit. Schemata allow us to make educated guesses about how certain slots must have been filled.
4. Schemata allow for orderly searches of memory. For example a previous parallel experience can be drawn upon.
5. Schemata facilitate editing and summarizing. By definition any schema possesses its own criteria of what is important. These can be used to create summaries of text that focus on important information.
6. Schemata permit inferential reconstruction. If readers have a gap in their memory, they can use a schema in conjunction with the information.

Pearson (1985, p.449)

Nickerson's areas of knowledge necessary for literacy:

- knowledge of orthography
- lexical knowledge
- knowledge of grammar and conventions of discourse
- basic knowledge of how the world works
- knowledge of social situations
- knowledge of goals, purposes, intentions and plans
- knowledge of ethics and human nature
- knowledge of logical inference rules
- knowledge of anaphoric reference rules

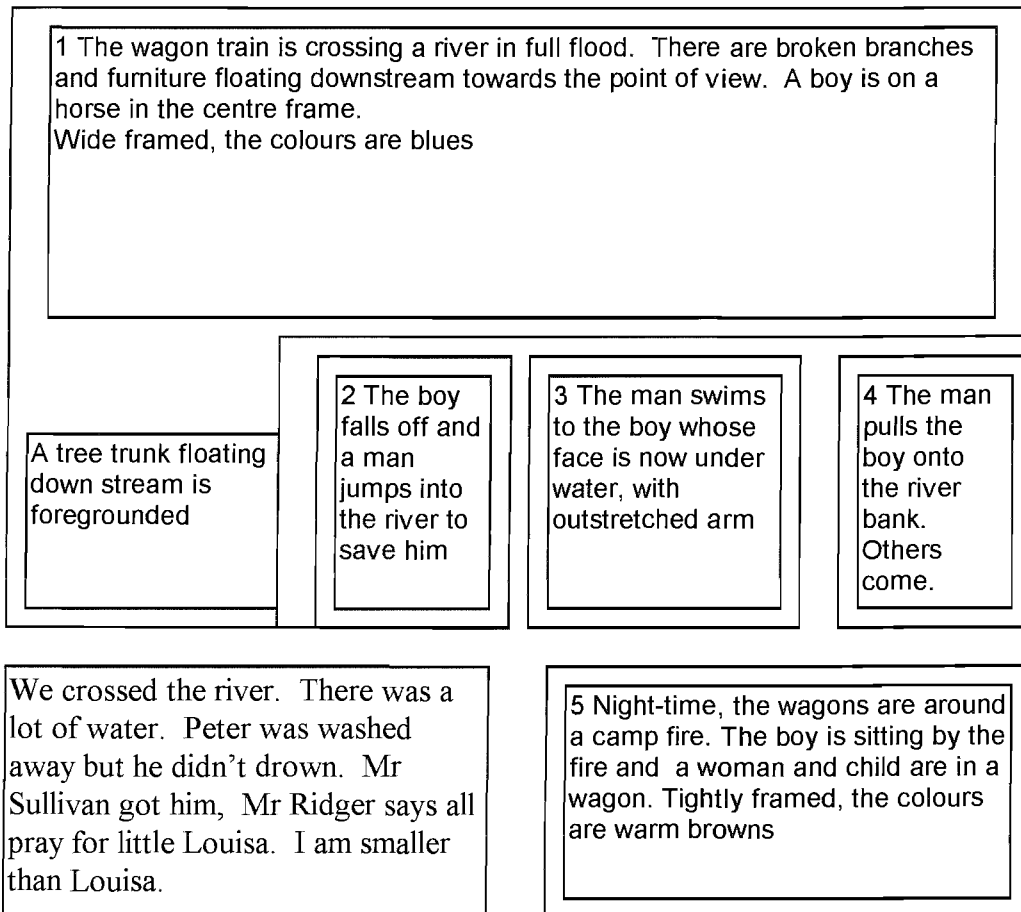
The above are essential to literacy, the following Nickerson states can facilitate reading:

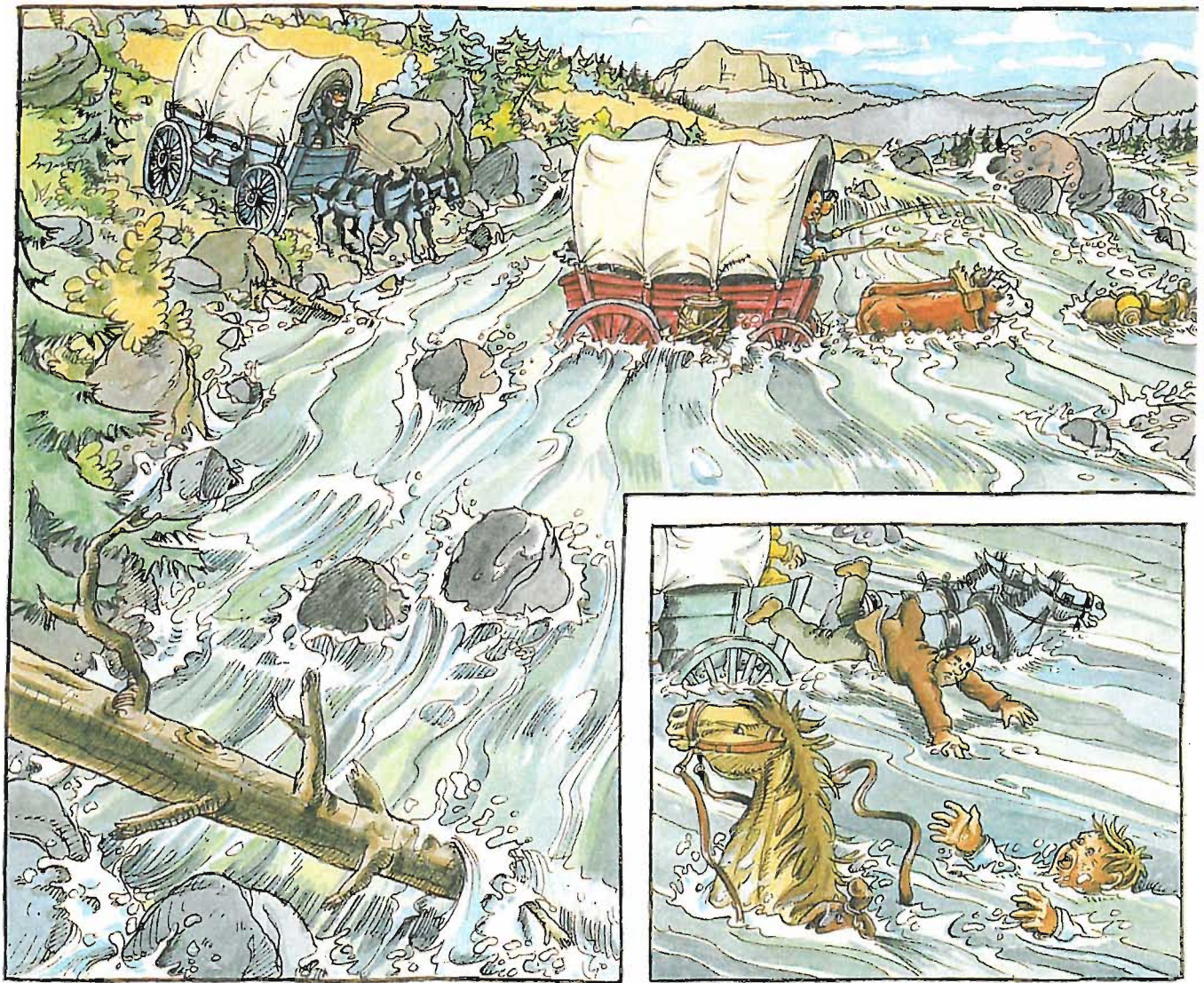
- knowledge of linguistic redundancies
- knowledge of the subject

(Wrolstad and Fisher, 1985, pp 24-8)

Appendix 2.1

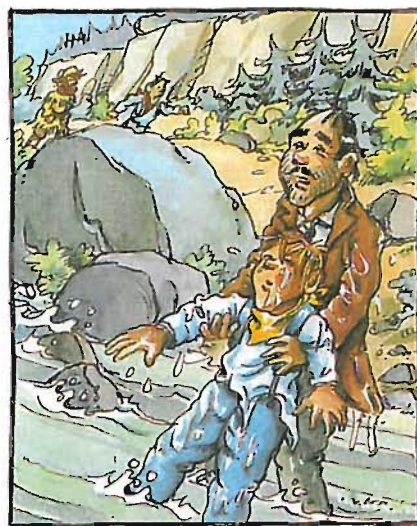
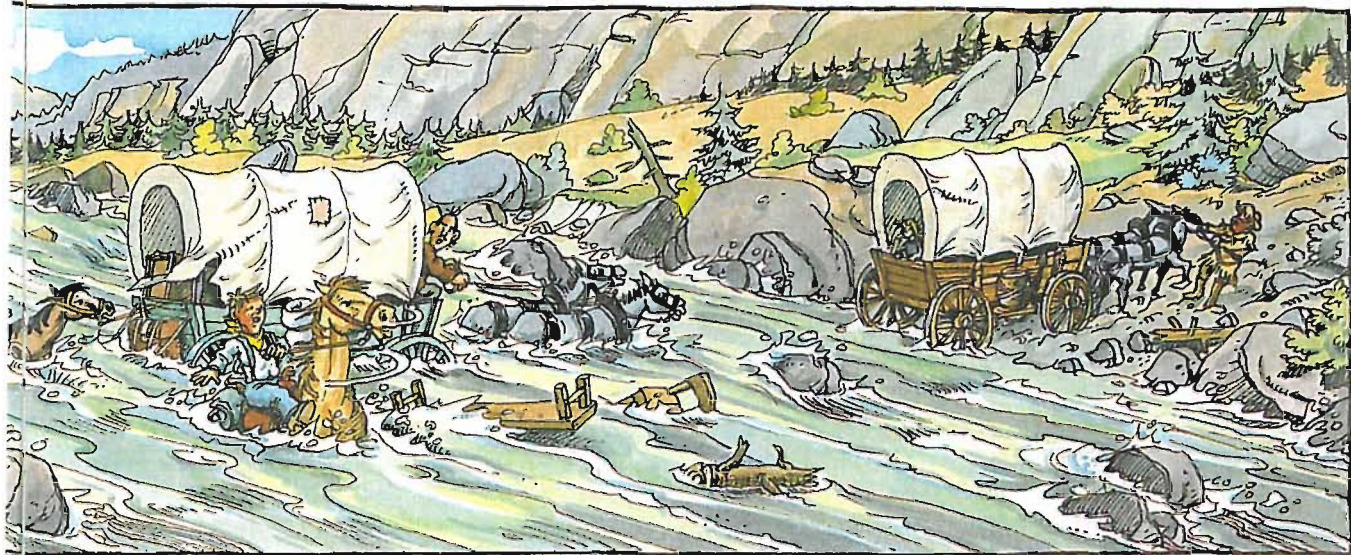
## Text A

*Going West* by Waddell/Dupasquier



We crossed the river. There was a lot of water.  
Peter was washed away but he didn't drown. Mr Sullivan got him.  
Mr Ridger says all pray for little Louisa.  
I am smaller than Louisa.







## Appendix 2.2

## Text B

*The Famous Five and The Golden Galleon* by Rosenzweig/Dufosse

1 IF TIMMY'S RIGHT THE INGOTS ARE IN THIS OLD TOMB... HEAVE! PHEW! TIMMY'S ALWAYS RIGHT, DICK" KEEP PUSHING YOU TWO HEAVE!

H/a through ivyclad arch of three children and a dog pushing the lid off a stone tomb

2 HERE WE GO... HEAVE HO! THE LID'S SLIDING OFF!

High angle, mid-shot of three with poles levering the lid off

OOOF!

IT IS! IT'S THE TREASURE FROM THE GOLDEN GALLEON!!

3 HURRAY! THE FIVE HAVE DONE IT AGAIN!!

H/a c/u of part of open tomb with three children and dog looking in. One child has opened sack and pulled out yellow gold bar.

IN KIRPIN VILLAGE. . . SUCH TIMES WE LIVE IN . . .

4 Town open air market. Girl in foreground at vegetable stall, examining onion. Stall keeper weighing potatoes for another customer in midground. Background general market scene

7 I MUST WARN THE OTHERS, QUICK! THEY MAY WALK RIGHT INTO THOSE MEN!

5 JUST THINK, MRE MARTIN, ONLY THIS MORNING I HEARD THAT TWO GANGSTERS ARRESTED YESTERDAY HAVE ESCAPED FROM THE PRISON HOSPITAL!

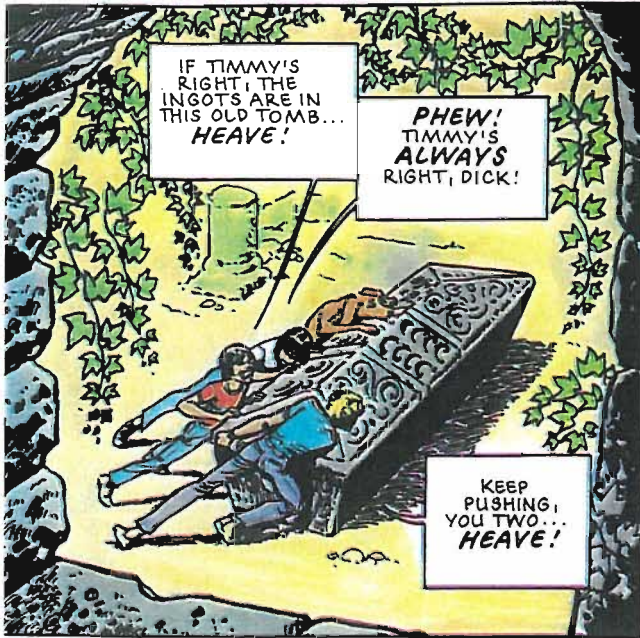
C/U of stallkeeper putting potatoes into bag and customer. Girl overhears conversation

6 AND THEY STILL HAVEN'T BEEN CAPTURED! GOODNESS ME... WHERE'S THAT LITTLE GIRL GOING SO FAST?

C/u of two women speed lines and startle lines, no background

L/a girl on bike from behind. Speed lines, riding past thatched cottage/tree





IF TIMMY'S  
RIGHT, THE  
INGOTS ARE IN  
THIS OLD TOMB...  
**HEAVE!**

**PHEW!**  
TIMMY'S  
ALWAYS  
RIGHT, DICK!

KEEP  
PUSHING,  
YOU TWO...  
**HEAVE!**



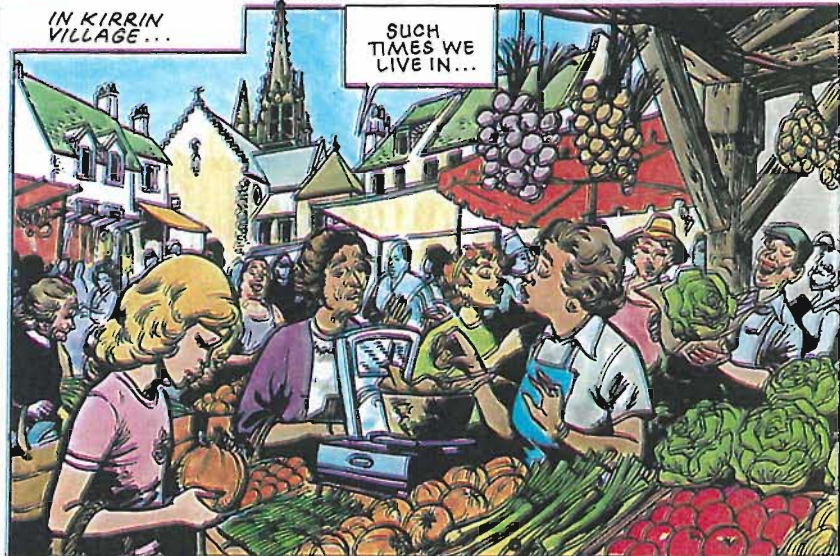
HERE WE GO...  
**HEAVE HO!**  
THE LID'S  
SLIDING OFF!

**OOOF!**



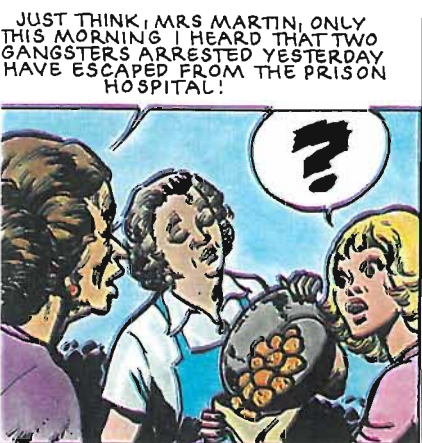
**IT IS! IT'S THE  
TREASURE FROM THE  
GOLDEN GALLEON!!**

**HURRAY!**  
THE FIVE HAVE  
DONE IT AGAIN!!



IN KIRPIN  
VILLAGE...

SUCH  
TIMES WE  
LIVE IN...



JUST THINK, MRS MARTIN, ONLY  
THIS MORNING I HEARD THAT TWO  
GANGSTERS ARRESTED YESTERDAY  
HAVE ESCAPED FROM THE PRISON  
HOSPITAL!



AND THEY STILL HAVEN'T  
BEEN RECAPTURED!

GOODNESS ME...  
WHERE'S THAT LITTLE  
GIRL GOING SO  
FAST?

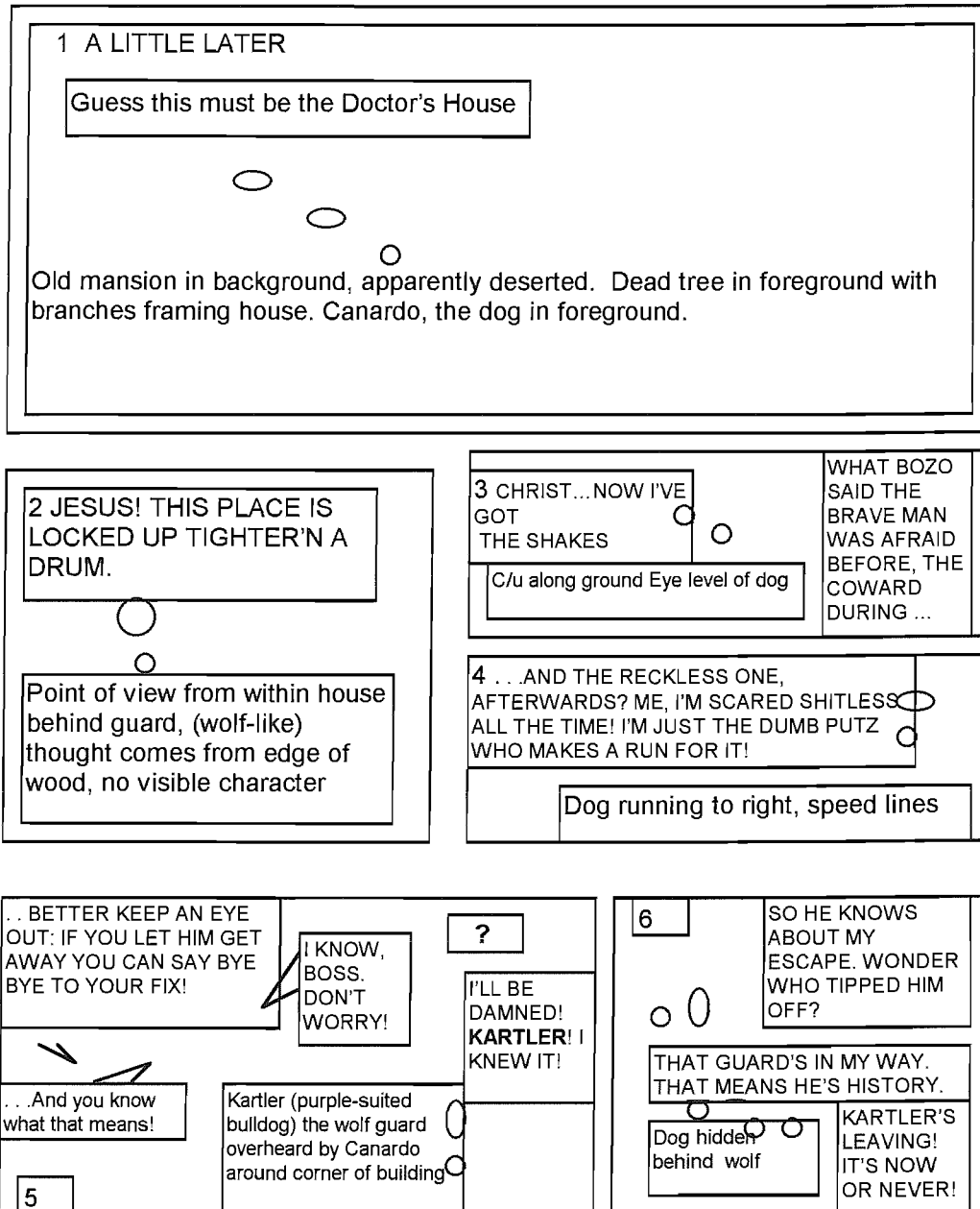


I MUST WARN THE  
OTHERS, QUICK! THEY MAY  
WALK RIGHT INTO  
THOSE MEN!



## Appendix 2.3

## Text C

*Canardo. A Shabby Dog Story* by Sokal

## Appendix 2.3 cont.

## Text C

7

GOOD THING I NEVER LEAVE HOME WITHOUT MY TOOLS.

Ferdinand looking in satchel

8

Wolf in foreground looking out of frame unaware of Ferdinand behind with rope

9

9 Ferdinand throws rope over wolf c/u

10

Arg

Wolf being garrotted by Ferdinand, eyes popping

AAH ! AN OLDIE BUT A GOODY: QUIET EFFECTIVE AND BEST OF ALL, FROM BEHIND! TAKES ME BACK TO ALGERIA...

11

**JEEZUS!** HIM TOO! HE'S GOT ONE OF THOSE HORRIBLE DEVICES IN HIS SKULL! POOR BASTARD!

Ferdinand looking down onto strangled wolf. Top of head comes off wolf to reveal metal

12

AT LEAST HE WON'T BE SUFFERING ANY MORE!

Wolf on ground Ferdinand pulling rope tight **PAF**

13

NOW TO FIND A WAY INTO THIS DUMP!

H/A Ferdinand walking around outside of house

14

**GRR OUAF KAI! CLINK GROOF Kaiii**

High wooden gate and wall Noises coming from behind them Ferdinand in foreground listening

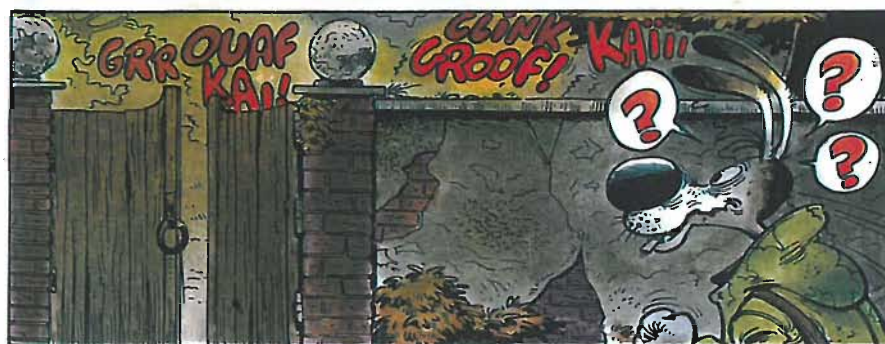
15

C/u Ferdinand looking into yard from behind gate. Startled expression

**SON OF A BITCH !**







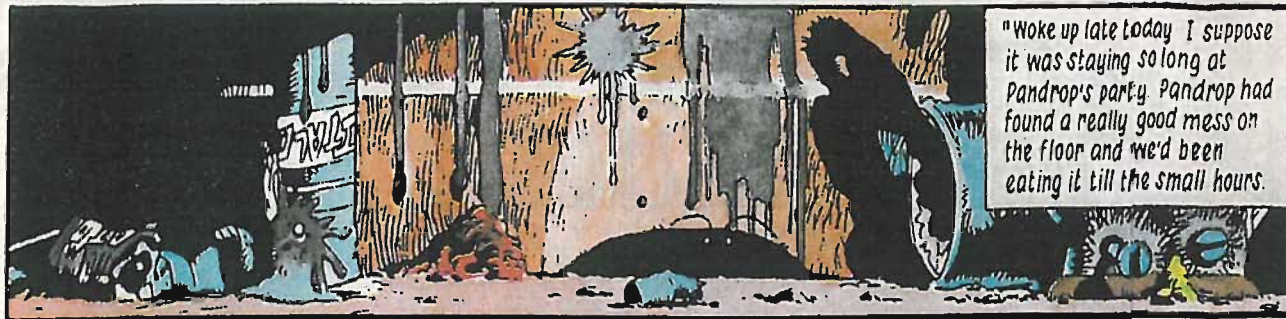
## Appendix 2.4

## Text D

*The Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach aged 13½ months* by Grover, Kennedy and Frame

<p>1</p> <p>RUBBISH ON FLOOR</p>	<p>"Wake up early today I suppose it was staying so long at Pendrop's party Pendrop had found a really good mess on the floor and we,'d' been eating it till the small hours.</p>	<p>2 "Anyway, by the time I peered out of my cranny I'd got my appetite well and truly back.</p>	<p>C/u cockroach looking out of frame</p>	
<p>The gang were already up and about. I joined them for breakfast</p> <p>3 Rear view cockroach with other cockroaches</p>		<p>"I'm 13 ½, which is quite old for a roach, so I'm big enough to make sure I always get to the tastiest bits "</p> <p>4 cockroaches on rubbish</p>	<p>5 The Secret <i>DIARY OF ADRIAN COCKROACH</i> aged 13 ½ months</p>	
<p>6 I ASSURE YOU, JUDGE DREDD, OUR KITCHEN IS CLEAN!</p> <p>I'LL BE THE JUDGE OF THAT!</p> <p><b>CRASH !</b></p> <p>L/A of Judge Dredd and two waiters. dressed in futuristic style clothes but with recognisable bow ties and white shirts. Dredd with helmet entering violently through swing door indicated by impact lines on door near fist knocking over rubbish stacked behind door. In background are laid tables.</p>		<p>7</p> <p>WHAT'S THIS - CLEAN O SPRAY?</p> <p>ER,Y-YES!</p> <p>Foreground fist with armoured glove finger pulling through dirt on table. Background unshaven chef. Midground pots boiling over.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>IT'S GREASE CREEP!</p> <p>Close-up Foreground the finger with dirt on raised upward from fist</p> <p>Background one of the waiters looking over at fist</p>	<p>9 WHAT KIND OF SOUP YOU MAKING, PAL - DANDRUFF? GET A HAT ON</p> <p>Foreground M/S of the unshaven chef, in white coat but without hat on stirring boiling pot - looking at Dredd who is behind seen from L/A Dredd with open mouth.</p>
<p>10</p> <p><b>JUDGE DREDD</b></p>				





"Woke up late today I suppose it was staying so long at Pandrop's party. Pandrop had found a really good mess on the floor and we'd been eating it till the small hours.

"The gang were already up and about. I joined them for breakfast.



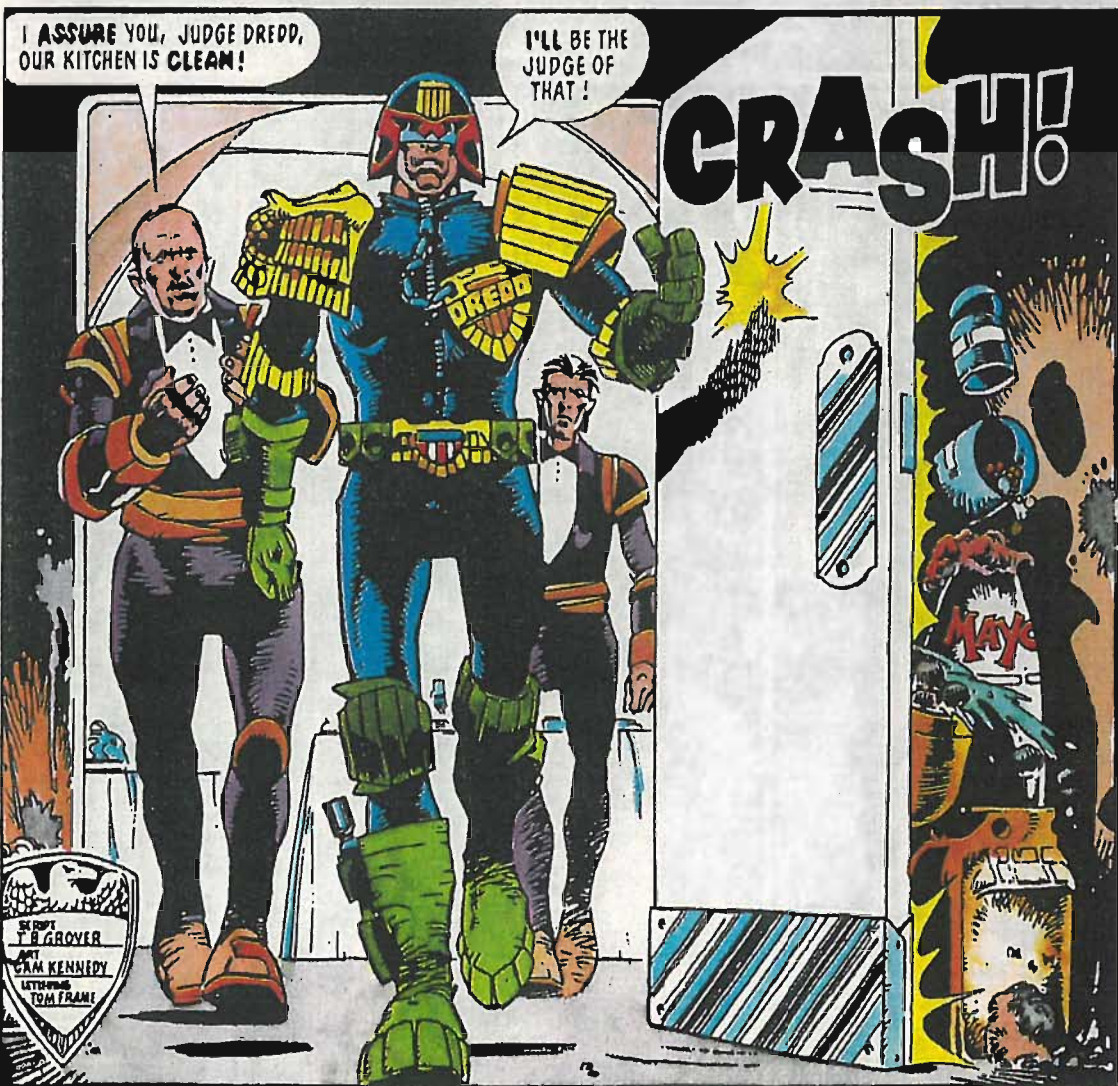
"I'm 13½, which is so I'm big enough I always get the to



I ASSURE YOU, JUDGE DREDD, OUR KITCHEN IS CLEAN!

I'LL BE THE JUDGE OF THAT!

**CRASH!**





anyway, by the time  
peered out of my  
anny I'd got my  
ppetite well and  
uly back.



quite old for a roach,  
o make sure I  
stiest bits."

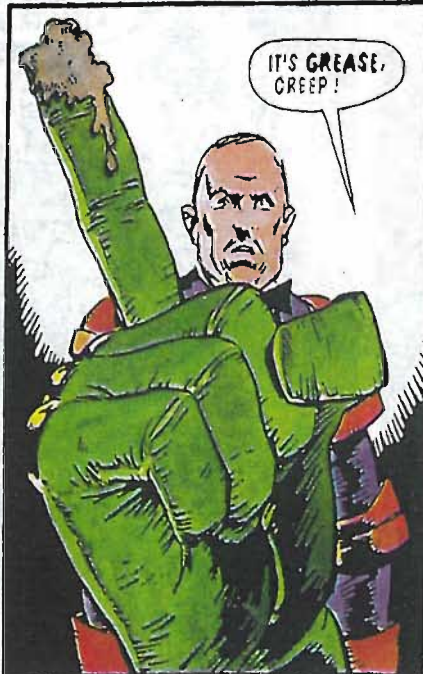


The Secret DIARY  
OF ADRIAN  
COCKROACH  
aged 13½ months

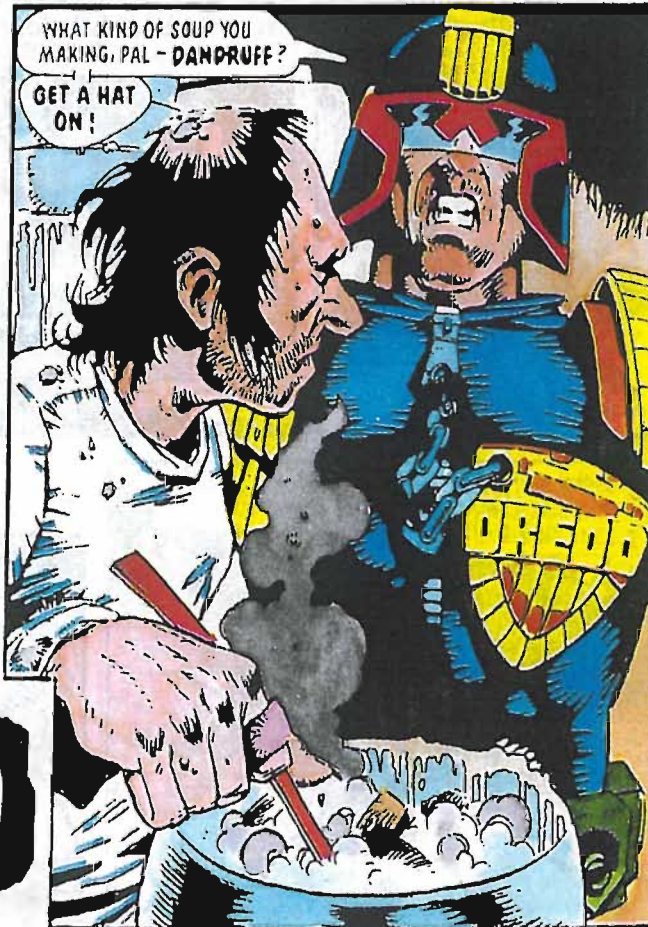


THIS -  
SPRAY?

ER, Y-YES!



IT'S GREASE,  
CREEP!



WHAT KIND OF SOUP YOU  
MAKING, PAL - DANDRUFF?

GET A HAT  
ON!

DREDD

DGE DREDD

### Appendix 3

#### **Cloze Procedure Study 1973**

A small-scale study done as part of the Open University Reading Development (Educational Studies, Post Experience Course) PE261

This study was based upon the premise that although primary skills such as grapho-phonetic are important in reading development, the use of syntactic and semantic cues, or intermediate skills are also important in this psycho-linguistic process. If students could recognise the help given to them in the texts by these function and content words, there may be a concurrent improvement in their reading fluency and comprehension.

The use of comics was stimulated by the comments made by Merritt.<sup>1</sup>

“There are two aspects to be considered. One is the language experience of the reader. The other is the language of the material read. The greater the discrepancy between the two the more difficult the reading becomes ... If the patterns of language structure are not familiar to the child he cannot correctly anticipate ...”

#### **Methodology**

Two comics were chosen, *The Whizzer* (3<sup>rd</sup> July 1971) and *Bunty* (4<sup>th</sup> July 1970). A run-in text, *Len and the River Mob* from a BBC Television Reading Programme, was also used. In both the book and the comics there were four readings. In the first reading the deletions were made with specific cues in mind. In the other three readings the deletions were on every sixth, eighth and tenth word. This is termed structured or ‘any-word’ deletion. The pairs were Dawn and Clare, Brian and Howard, all from a class of 9-11 year olds. The children were sat in pairs with the tape recorder and read the deleted text together. The recorded results were then discussed.

#### **Group A**

Clare found the comic work easier than Dawn, and in discussion afterwards she stated that she preferred the comics to the story. Dawn, the weaker child academically, although with a higher reading age, probably found the more structured text easier. In order to read the comic it was essential to look at the pictures to gain some knowledge of who was talking to whom, what actions were occurring and location. The level of the vocabulary was not controlled as in the reading book.

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<sup>1</sup> Merritt J.(1969) ‘Reading Skills, Theory and Practice’ Proceedings of the sixth annual study conference of the United Kingdom Reading Association, Nottingham, Ward Lock Educational

**Group B**

With the second pair the mix was again between an apparently competent reader, but who had a low comprehension score, and a less fluent but brighter child. They were able to help each other with the reading of the comic, although Howard, the brighter boy, was quicker in choosing words where they were deleted. They used the pictures to help them to find the correct word.

**Discussion**

The less structured vocabulary may have impeded reading for less able students. Those students who used the picture clues and the words read more accurately and filled in the gaps.

Quite a high level of general knowledge was needed to understand some of the references.

The essential basis of the intermediate skills is the ability to respond simultaneously to a variety of kinds of sequences; letter sequence, phonemic sequence, word sequence, grammatical sequence.

The responses are on the next page.

Figure 3.1 Analysis of responses to two comic texts using tenth word deletions

## Group A

‘Hazel’s Helping Hand’ from *Bunty* (every tenth word deleted)

words placed in cloze gap	syntactic or semantic	forward acting (FA) or backward acting (BA	across or within the text	textual context (TC) or reader’s knowledge (RK)
we’re	syn	BA	across	TC
Hazel	sem	BA	across	TC
(not) *	syn	FA	within	TC
Aunt	sem	BA	across	TC
(those) *	syn	BA	within	TC
want	syn	BA	within	TC
(the) *	syn	BA	within	TC
(sorry)	syn	BA	within	TC
illnesses	sem	BA	across	TC
(she) *	syn	BA	within	TC
Hazel/Clarice	sem	BA	across	TC
let	syn	BA	within	TC
(want) *	syn	BA	within	TC
she	syn	FA	within	TC
(away) *	syn	BA	within	TC
do	syn	BA	within	TC
(been) *	syn	FA	wihin	TC
(come) *	syn	FA	within	TC
be	syn	BA	within	TC
oil	sem	BA	within	RK
occasions	sem	BA	within	RK

## Group B

‘Wear ‘em out Wilf’ from *Whizzer* (every tenth word deleted)

words placed in cloze gap	syntactic or semantic	Forward acting FA or backward acting BA	across or within the text	textual context TC or reader’s knowledge RK
job	syn	BA	within	TC
that	syn	BA	within	TC
open p.c.	syn	BA	within	TC
all	syn	BA	within	TC
throw p.c.	syn	FA	within	TC
<u>catch</u> *	syn	BA	within	TC
we	syn	BA	within	TC
those	syn	FA	within	TC
I’m	syn	FA	within	TC
<u>didn’t</u>	syn	FA	within	TC

The circled responses are ‘incorrect’, but where they are \* the response is acceptable given the context cues.  
p.c. = picture cue

**Bunty** selected tenth deletions

we’re, Aunt, the , want, our, right, illnesses, I, Clarice, let, like, she, packing, do,  
slowly, get, be, oil, occasions, know, has, since, feeling, touch, the, my, say.

**Whizzer** selected tenth deletions

have, nightshirt, my, Jock, you, with, an, coin, the, flying, there, again, a, give, got,  
head.

**The Investigation.**

This investigation used two pairs of year six, (ten year olds), one pair of boys and one of girls. All the children were of below average reading ages. They were in my teaching group and part of a remedial class. They were self-selected and were therefore friendship pairs. All results were tape recorded, transcribed and then discussed afterwards with the children.

As a ‘run-in’ activity the children were given a cloze procedure exercise on a normal text, so that any procedural difficulties could be overcome, for example the use of the tape recorder. This also provided evidence in the use of syntactic and semantic cueing in all the students.

The two comics were *The Whizzer* and *Bunty*. This was a choice reflecting their different gender appeals as well as their popularity at this time amongst the age

group with which I was working. There were several problems in using the comic with this type of exercise of cloze procedure which were discovered as the exercise progressed and were not apparent in a normal text. For example, only the words were being used in terms of units, and images were ignored as meaningful units. The lack of linearity in design meant that order was sometimes difficult to decide and therefore accuracy of systematic deletion could not be maintained. Compound words were common, for example “talk about non-stop, mid-air, re-fuelling”. It was decided to count these as one unit, but of course this could be challenged. Stuttering was often used to express emotion, “that-that, I-I”, and again these were counted as one unit. It was also decided that exclamations or neologisms such as ‘yikes’ and ‘grrr’ were to be discounted as word units. As can be seen from this list there were significant operational difficulties in using this approach on the comic.

### **Summary of the responses:**

Dawn and Clare had similar reading ages, but Dawn was a slow child who found difficulty with most activities. Clare, on the other hand, was an open enthusiastic girl who had a good grasp of mathematical concepts but found reading difficult. In the run-in activity both girls had provided some of the answers although Clare provided the majority. They both managed the texts fairly easily.

When using the comic it was Clare who obviously found the exercise easier than Dawn. In discussion afterwards she said that she preferred the comic to the purely written text. Dawn on the other hand found the reading of the normal written text easier. It was therefore hypothesised that more advanced reading skills, although not in the formal sense which could be defined as her Reading Age, enabled Clare to use the combination of information to fill in the gaps or ellipses of the comic. In order to read the comic it was necessary to look at the pictures for cues, such as who was talking to whom, where it was set and what was the action. Dawn found this task more difficult to do than Clare, who seemed to assimilate both text and pictures quite easily and develop responses to them which were articulate and showed the higher reading processes.

In the second group, Brian was an apparently fluent reader but with a low level of comprehension. Howard was a weaker reader, but had a higher IQ than Brian. When reading the run-in text Brian was much fluent than Howard, but Howard was much quicker at using the cues to fill in the deleted words. With the comic, both used the pictures to help them, for example when the burglars see the door open, in order to provide a suitable substitute word. As in the first group there was a noticeable relationship between the ability of the children to decode all the information, rather than to be able to decode the words. The assistance given to the readers in each pair by the visual as well as verbal cues enabled them to read the texts with more understanding.



## Appendix 4

### **Reader Response Study 1989**

A small-scale study done as part of the MA(Ed) in Language, Literature and Media Studies at the University of Southampton

For the individual reader the text created by the inferential processes, where possible worlds are “imagined, believed, wished” (Eco, 1979, p. 219) occurs when one is lost in the other world of the imagination. The problem for the researcher when studying a reader and a text is to know whether comprehension and apprehension work in synchronisation, or whether, as in a ‘round’, one comes before the other and is then repeated with a time lapse. By looking at the quality of talk by students over a single text it was hoped, in this small scale research, possibly to reveal something of the interaction.

For this purpose the teacher-researcher is measuring the quality of the secondary responses of the reader through their words and their silences, and through the interpretative paradigm of the researcher. There is no direct access to the primary responses. With a problem text, where the reader has to fill the ‘gaps’ (Iser, 1974) left by the author the process can often be more obvious as the readers move towards comprehension.

The gaps are part of the syntagm of the text. The choice, as in the cloze procedure exercises comes from the possibilities within the paradigm. The reader extrapolates from the whole what is required to make sense of the text, and to make it coherent. In other words the reader becomes partly the writer.<sup>1</sup> Thus there is a dynamic between the reader as interpellated by the text. Eco also considered the spaces that a text contains to invite the reader, “At the level of discursive structure the reader is invited to fill up various empty phrastic spaces (texts are lazy machineries that ask someone to do part of their job.)” (Eco, 1979, p. 214) Rosenblatt sees the tension between the reader’s freedom and the textual constraints as equals within a transaction, and claims that the evocation of reading will fall somewhere on the continuum between the aesthetic and efferent pole.

The text chosen for this study was *The Tin-pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* by Raymond Briggs. In appearance this is apparently a picture book with cartoon characters. This is further emphasised by the opening sentence, ‘Once upon a time ...’ But this generic expectation is disrupted by the ‘sad island’. The narrative moves from the cartoon characters in vivid colours to monochrome drawings with a brutal and stark realism. There is no fairy tale ending here. The text is based upon the Falklands War and the consequences both for the soldiers and the islanders. So what appears to be superficially about a confrontation between two cartoon protagonists is disrupted and what is revealed is a highly polemical diatribe against war-mongering politicians.

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<sup>1</sup> Barthes, (1986) *The Rustle of Language*, Oxford, Blackwell

## Methodology and Methods

This was based upon a case study using qualitative data. (Walker, 1985, *Doing Research. A Handbook for Teachers*) Pairs of students were chosen to discuss this text, from the Primary age range (11 year olds) withdrawn from a normal teaching group and from an Adult Basic Education class where literacy was part of their training programme. The Primary girls were good readers, and the boys weaker readers. They were self-selected for friendship to allow for freer discussion. The respondents were asked to read and discuss the story. Their responses were recorded.

Pairs avoided technical problems with listening and identifying voices, particularly with young children. Also at a practical level recordings during teaching time meant that limited space was available.

The pairs were given a list of questions which they *could* use to help them. These were comprehension-style questions. In practice these were ignored.

The tapes were transcribed using an adapted model from Graddol *et al.* The transcriptions were then colour-coded, annotated and interpreted using the following criteria: description, assessment and evaluation, personal response, question and answer, transcription and interpretation. These categories were qualitatively biased. In quantitative terms an analysis of the number of references to words and pictures was also made.<sup>2</sup>

*Figure 4.1 A % calculation of references to pictures and words by pairs.*

	Pictures	Words	Total %
Matthew/Simon	35	11	46
Anna/Angela	21	15	36
Linda/Mandy	11	14	25

These figures illustrate the different styles of the three pairs. Matthew and Simon were more descriptive, so that 40% of their discussion was directly related to textual content. This was a result of Matthew's domination of the conversation; Simon had a more reflective response style. The girls were also more interested in the illustrations, but it was more evenly balanced. The adults, Linda and Mandy, made noticeably fewer comments which were directly textually related. They also reversed the emphasis onto the words. The searching nature of the discussion, orchestrated by Linda, proved the gate into the meaning of the book.

There were several misreadings of both written and pictorial texts, and considerable debate over the large gaps, spatial and temporal, left by the author. The readers tried to fill these in various ways. They tried to organise the information so that they could make sense of it, to fulfil expectations that had been aroused. The younger readers were unsure about the audience of the book because they were unable to locate the tone of satire in their framework of knowledges. The adults appeared to have understood this tone in Briggs' book, but were unclear about the motivation of the characters. Simon, who had the lowest reading age of the four children, read the

<sup>2</sup> The tapes, transcriptions and interpretations of the taped discussions are available.



book more empathetically than the others, and would certainly have gained marks for the higher level of comprehension of the text that he revealed. The others mainly stayed at the lower levels of informational reading. The adults, regarded as semi-literate, were the most perceptive of all in their discussion, pulling on their own experiences and knowledge.

### **Discussion**

The style of research enabled the researcher to listen into the readers' secondary responses. What were particularly interesting were the questions, half-formed and tentative, which were asked, and the proposing of possible solutions or answers. Here the reader's primary response seems to be more closely reached.

The use of this type of text may have an educational purpose with adults and children if it helps them to work on visual and linguistic cues for understanding, and therefore improve both literacies.

The use texts and styles of textual analysis which encourage questioning, result in deeper understanding, "in greater growth in inferential thinking (at no loss to and sometime a gain in literal comprehension) than do approaches that emphasize literal comprehension."<sup>3</sup>

Readers can be heard to use the cues from both visual and linguistic codes to read the text, moving between one code and the other. The more skilfully they can use them the more they can access other areas of knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> Pearson in Mayor and Pugh (1987) Language Communication and Education p. 452

### Appendix 5

#### **Pilot Studies 1993: A Summary of Trial Activities undertaken before the Final Field Research**

The purpose of the pilot studies was to establish texts and activities which could be used with all the students, particularly those from the Learning Support Services. The students who were chosen from this group had below-average academic achievement and had specialist help in literacy and numeracy. Initially I worked with a group of seven LSS students, who had been chosen by their literacy teacher. Over a period of approximately two terms I worked with the students for one hour per week. Each session involved talking to the students, using the tape recorder, and a range of activities using comics. The GCSE and A level students were in my established teaching groups so access, ability to do the activities and group dynamics were not seen as an issue.

The initial sessions were used to establish a rapport with the LSS students, several of whom had a natural reserve with a 'stranger'. A questionnaire was administered to establish their knowledge about comics. This was intended to be done by the students alone but I had over-estimated their ability to do this without help or without discussion, so that the questionnaire became the centre of a session's activity, rather than just a fact-finding exercise. It was therefore decided that questionnaires as part of the final research would not be used. Semi-structured individual interviews to follow up the questionnaires were then done with the students. These interviews were used to discover more about their comic reading habits, or why they claimed not to have read comics. The interviews also helped me to talk to the students, and for them to get used to the tape recorder, but they also revealed that the students were waiting to give the 'right' answer. They wanted to please, and further probing revealed that their initial responses were not always accurate. (The questionnaire and the interview questions are at the end of this appendix).

The first tape recorder I had used had a separate microphone, and the students had 'played' with this, which meant that most of the recordings were not useful for technical reasons, or because the material was not relevant. I therefore decided to use a tape recorder with an internal microphone. This limited the pick-up range and meant that group discussions would be difficult to use in the research. This was one reason for using pairs in the final research. The interviews also helped me to establish which pairs in the LSS group would work together comfortably.

#### **Trial Activities**

(unless stated all activities were piloted with all levels.)

- I cut up a photocopied page of a comic, which the students had to then reconstruct into a logical order in order to tell a 'story'. This became a shape matching exercise for the LSS students who assembled the frames to fit into each other to make an A4 page without looking at the content. The GCSE cohort similarly looked for clues outside the narrative, in this case where the signature of the author was, and decided

that the frame with the signature had to be the final frame. This activity was done only with the LSS students and GCSE students. The purpose had been to encourage them to look at how narrative is constructed with image and text. The exercise required that frames from identical pages be cut up into random shapes, so that the shape became immaterial to the reconstruction. As frames are a significant part of the meaning of a comic page (see Chapter 3 The Language of Comics)) this was felt to be an inappropriate activity for this research.

- Identifying frames. One person picked a frame from a page and described it to a partner, who had the same page, in enough detail so that the partner could pick out the correct frame from the page. This was aimed at encouraging students to give detailed descriptions aloud, and was adapted into the final research.
- Cutting up pictures from other sources and linking them together with text to make some logical connection between apparently disparate images. The aim of this activity was to focus on the importance of the words on a comic page and on their function. GCSE and A level students participated in this activity. The random nature of the images meant that it was difficult to assess the results without intensive interviewing.
- Plan a comic story with list of action/dialogue in each frame. Draw the comic page with words and pictures. This proved a useful exercise in discussing how students thought they established narrative information, but again it was not a focused activity.
- Take an establishing frame from a graphic novel, usually the first frame, and ask the pairs to discuss (taped) what they could see in the frame and the possible type of story which might follow. In discussion ask them to give their reasons to each other for their decisions. The drawback with this exercise was that there was not enough narrative information in one frame for the weaker students. The subtleties of angle, framing and so on were difficult for them to talk about.
- Taped individual responses to a comic page. Taped pair discussions whilst reading a comic together. The latter proved much richer in material as the students had actually to verbalize to their partner what they were thinking. But it had the disadvantage that students would point at a frame without specifying aloud which frame they were looking at and this was then difficult to transcribe and interpret.
- Although it could be said that all these activities were valuable, the final decisions on the type of research method which would help to clarify how readers read comics, was to have pairs reading a comic page aloud to their partner, who could not see the page. The 'blind' partner then had to try to suggest a possible narrative or action, and then the reader could show the page to their partner and they could discuss the possibilities together. This had the advantage that the students had to describe aloud and accurately what they could see in order to help their partner as much as possible, and also that it provoked discussion.

**Pilot Questionnaire**

1. NAME..... TUTOR GROUP.....

2. AGE.....

3. YEAR (circle the year you are in at QMC)      1      2      3

4. What subjects are you studying this year?

5. What do you read OUTSIDE of college? (please tick)

novels (fictional stories)

factual books

magazines (please list 2 you read most often)

newspapers (which one do you most often read?)

comic books

comics

any other (please list)

nothing

6. Which three types of reading listed above in 5 do you most enjoy?

i

ii

iii

7. If you read comics which ones do you read at the moment? (give up to three)

8. If you read comic books which ones have you read recently? (give up to three)  
(try to give the title and the author if possible)

### Pilot Interviews

These questions were asked by the researcher of individual students and responses were noted and taped. The aim was to have a semi-structured interview which could allow the students to explore their own personal reading. Two interviews were prepared. Pilot Interview 1 was with students who said that they still read comics and comic books. Pilot Interview 2 was with students who said that they didn't read comics or comic books.

*Pilot Interview 1:* Students who said in their questionnaire that they read comics

1. What is your name? (to identify on the tape)
2. You said in the questionnaire that you enjoyed reading comics and comic books.  
Which ones have you read recently?
- 3a. Which of these (response from 2) is your favourite at the moment?
- 3b. Why do you enjoy this particular one?
4. What aspects of the comic do you enjoy the most? (help out with list if no response)  
humour, pictures, types of stories, characters, easy to read, quick to read
5. Is there anything about comic books which is sometimes unclear to you? (help with layout, picture style, writing, nothing if no response)
6. When do you read a comic or comic book?
7. Where do you read a comic or comic book?
8. This is a difficult one. Can you describe how you read it? Do you, for example, skim through quickly and then go back over the story? Do you look at the pictures first?
9. What are you feel about comics and comic books? Discussion

*Pilot Interview 2:* with non-readers of comics/comic books

1. What is your name? (to identify student on the tape)  
You said in your questionnaire that you do not read comics at the moment.
- 2a. Have you read comics in the past?
- 2b. If you have what were they?  
If never, why was that?
3. Can you tell me why you don't read them now? (help out if no response)  
you don't like reading  
the stories are uninteresting  
other people put you off
4. Discussion: what do you like to read at the moment?

## Appendix 6

### **Transcripts**

(NB the comments in brackets are made by the teacher/researcher to try to encourage talk with these pairs who were obviously spending long periods in silence)

Text A *Going West* LSS students Carrie and Wendy [ pair 1]

1. Wild west wild west sort of thing
2. (*clues to its setting*)
3. things in it wagons countryside
4. not present day
5. action
6. finding safety probably the gang's broke
7. it's windy as well
8. (*what happened before to make the river swollen*)
9. bridge collapsed a bridge there probably collapsed
10. dam breaking
11. weather windy as well
12. could be windy might be windy
13. (*why not normal because of tree*)
14. *Can you tell they've all fallen out*
15. *falls off horse then then he's jumped out to rescue him*
16. *what are they doing*
17. *Have they got a fire to keep themselves warm*)
18. the boy and the bloke who saved the boy
19. (*What time of day - how do you know*)

Text A *Going West* Chris and Chris [pair 2]

1. top to bottom
2. problem
3. setting
4. expressions saying
5. judge from the clothes
6. they are cowboys
7. move into inside of caravan looking out
8. clues not very well candles expression on faces
9. caravan - men are doing saying
10. (*what could they be saying*)

Text A ***Going West*** LSS students Kevin and Ian [pair 3]

1. I'm reading the big one first because it's, because it's big and it's more illustrated
2. (*where are we*)
3. I'd search over the page
4. war
5. stampede
6. Indians
7. set off

Text B ***Famous Five*** LSS Wendy and Carrie [pair 1]

1. Blue hands
2. surprised
3. zig-zag lines
4. sounds like

Text B ***Famous Five*** LSS Chris and Chris [pair 2]

1. (*What's happening in frame?*)
2. Sets time as
3. actions
4. faces
5. direction grabbed either that or escaping background
6. it's really easy to get out of jail
7. (*describe what is happening*)
8. in between the frame
9. they've turned
10. telling

Text B ***Famous Five*** LSS Kevin and Ian [pair 3]

1. Drama characters
2. (*bubbles thought signs show different people talking*)
3. (*boxes at side what are they?*)
4. telling the story

Text B ***Famous Five*** GCSE Mark and Ben [pair 4]

1. Looking through tombstone
2. All trying to push this tombstone
3. words
4. each pole trying to yank lid
5. treasure - everyone's smiling collecting gold
6. Busy market place
7. Is this a totally different story
8. Next picture Market place busy - gossip

9. conversation women
10. two women carry on talking read text
11. text is read out aloud but with no reference to the pictures

Text B *Famous Five* GCSE Dan and Sarah [pair 6]

1. I'll tell you first
2. the whole story is about kids, teenagers, playing
3. they're pushing a great big boat thing
4. but it's on land
5. I know what it is - it looks like a grave maybe in woods,
6. because all leaves around
7. sticks to try to open
8. treasure chest with treasure in
9. in third one church, shops, market stalls, she's buying a cabbage
10. in the fourth - potatoes, weighing machines, pay into
11. women's got a question mark above so she's shocked
12. oh it's about prison escape

Text B *Famous Five* A Level, Beverly and Gina [pair 7]

1. G Looks as though its through the view of an archway, some kind of plant
2. And in the middle it's what we know is a tomb and they are
3. pushing it
4. B you are doing connotation there
5. And they are in some kind of ancient well it is made of stone
6. B What are they wearing?
7. Jeans and T shirt
8. There in some kind of some kind of brick wall and they are using
9. some kind of pole or stick to lever the lid off the tomb
10. They say 'oof'
11. B Who says what?
12. G I don't know
13. It's not the dog
14. OK
15. The next one they've opened the tomb and they are looking in it
16. You can see what it is the tomb bars of something in sacks
17. The speech "it's the treasure from the Golden Galleon"
18. B So it's the treasure
19. "Hurray the 5 have done it again"
20. The 5 but there's only three and a dog there
21. G Yes there's 2 missing
22. The next one in Kirrin village it says
23. There's some woman obviously whingeing 'such times we live in' and there



24. in a market place a vegetable store, there's buildings behind then and a
25. church with a spire
26. There's lots of people in the background and a woman who's selling
27. vegetables and a young girl looking at a vegetable
28. quotes words
29. the girl has an alarmed expression on her face and the speech bubble has
30. a large question mark
31. B I see
32. And they still haven't re-captured
33. Goodness me where's that little girl going so fast and there's some
34. lines like in cartoon yes speed lines
35. Obviously some girl speeding off on her bicycle
36. the speed lines
37. Big tree in foreground and a speech bubble, 'I must warn the others .
38. B I've got a good idea what the narrative is here then
39. It was the Famous Five, but then I was confused because there was one
40. character missing, but then at the end there was this girl who was at the veg stall is
41. that the other character?
42. They are in a foreign country
43. Kirrin village
44. I don't know it's hard to tell
45. That looks foreign, but then this doesn't look like ancient Greece or
46. Egyptian or anything. They are foreign dress
47. So they follow the dog to the tomb. They've opened it up and find the
48. treasure because it's the gold bars because they are holding up the gold
49. bars
50. You can see hear it's ancient because of the decoration and the ivy
51. Because ivy suggests old stuff
52. And the brick because it's all crumbling
53. OK then we found out that there's been some danger because the girl
54. found out that these two women talking about what is it escaped
55. gangsters arrested yesterday ...quotes and she's got a very shocked
56. expression a very puzzled expression so the connotations which I
57. presume, maybe, they are hiding that treasure, they stole it in
58. the first place, or they want to find it
59. could be
60. The FF must have some run-in with them earlier ...so these lot are in
61. danger now because the convicts know where the treasure is hidden and
62. it's going to go back to them and find these kids with them. So that's
63. why she's hurrying, and you can tell she's hurrying, and you can tell
64. she's hurrying like you say and those speed lines going along and the
65. bike

- 66. G If you've read the FF you can work it out
- 67. It's typical if you are familiar with the story. It's typical EB
- 68. these gangsters, and why the little girl is so worried
- 69. Maybe they put the gangsters into prison in the first place, because
- 70. they're always doing those things
- 71. B Who knows

Text B *Famous Five* A Level Ben and Martin [pair 8]

- 1. B In the first picture we've got a high angle shot. Looking down through a sort of a
- 2. window in a castle or something, looking down inside I think, at these three geezers
- 3. and a dog and they've got this casket and a tomb or something and they are trying to
- 4. push it off by the looks of it and lots of greenery around it looks like old building
- 5. there's a pillar that's broken suggests it might be old
- 6. and one geezer's saying, "If Timmy's right, the ingots, "I do not know who the
- 7. ingots are (Martin interrupts 'ingots are Indians') the ingots are in this tomb" and
- then says
- 8. "heave"
- 9. The other guy says "pheww Timmy's always right, Dick"
- 10. the other guy says "keep pushing you two heave"
- 11. M Right so we are seeing a whole area of jungle, with three men and a dog, looking
- into
- 12. (B 'looking through a window')
- 13. M but you said it's an omniscient shot, obviously so it's we're supposed to see a
- 14. wide area
- 15. tell me again what the three blokes said (B repeats)
- 16. so obviously they are looking for something the ingots I think they are some sort of
- 17. ancient Indian thing aren't they?
- 18. B It sounds like some sort of kid's adventure something like these three kids in a
- 19. jungle looking for these Indians, obviously a ruin, it's all overgrown, there's a little
- 20. broken pillar and that, there's a dog there as well I don't know if that's got to do
- 21. with anything
- 22. and looking down on them like victims like something's watching over them as well
- 23. supposed to be a status symbol
- 24. B and the next one
- 25. yeh
- 26. M it's the next picture
- 27. B we're still looking down at them, pretty much the same angle, we've come a lot
- 28. closer now, you can see three kids have got sticks and they've jammed it in the top
- 29. of this tomb trying to pull it open
- 30. M still trying to get it open
- 31. B yeh and one guy goes, "here we go heave ho the lid's sliding off"

32. And this other guy goes whoof
33. You can see more ruins and rubble around now, you can definitely see more like old
34. Egyptian or something like that
35. M to symbolise how old
36. B yeh and the tomb slightly open, they could probably look in if they wanted to so it
37. pretty much emphasised what we saw in the first one, I don't know where they got
38. the sticks from either
39. M probably found them
40. B OK the third shot again looking from above, and it's got the same three people  
and
41. the dog. And they are saying, "it is the treasure from the Golden Galleon" and the
42. other goes "hooray the five have done it again" even though there's only four of
43. them that's including the dog
44. M But there could be others that died before, or not died but got left behind
45. B all right they're still looking like victims
46. B looking like victims even though they've found the treasure
47. One of them's a girl as well, I've just noticed
48. then ok then we cut up somewhere else
49. We're now in the Kirrin village and we've lost the high angle and we are on an eye
50. level
51. M right so it is definitely trying to say, it's definitely less hostile in the village
52. then there's all these old women apart from this one she's quite fine actually
53. actually
54. This women is saying "such times we live in" I don't know why and there lots of  
grapes,
55. fruit and veg around that sort of stuff
56. A church, rather like a normal village scene, in a church in the background set in
57. M is it definitely still set in the jungle or not at all
58. B what in a village
59. M I thought you meant a jungle village
60. B oh no it's got modern building in the background
61. M that's the problem of trying to describe to each other what you see
62. B alright sorry
63. M misunderstanding
64. B modern village civilization
65. M cut a long way away
66. changed scenery completely
67. B there's all the old women buying fruit and veg like you do
68. and we stick with them, again at eye level, and we've lost the background and focus
69. on the three characters, and one of them says, "just think Mrs. Martin, only this
70. morning I heard that two gangsters were arrested yesterday escaped from the prison
71. hospital". And the other woman says "?" quite how you say question mark I'm not

72. sure but that's what it's got in the speech bubble
73. so because we've lost the background there's more emphasis on the characters
74. M but is it a speech bubble or a thought bubble?
75. B a speech bubble
76. M this is very strange
77. B some foreign lingo we're not aware of
78. M yes obviously
79. B so 'cause we've lost the background and we focus on them now importance
80. M so where they are now is not important but what they are saying is
81. B that's it OK next shot we lose the nice-looking woman we are left with the two old
82. women one of them says "they still haven't been re-captured" and the other one says
83. "goodness me why is that little girl going so fast?"
84. Oh yes, she's standing there and something's been snatched out of her hand. And the
85. next shot, the nice girl
86. on her bike and she's obviously snatched something from the woman's hand
87. and she says, "I must warn the others quick, they may walk into the others hands" and
88. she's thinking that
89. And this time see trees and buildings and that
90. M just re-cap on the other frame
91. B the other two - it looks like she may have taken something from her hand, but I'm not
92. sure and then she zooms off into the trees and that
93. M and then she thinks I must warn the others
94. B now we've got all these lines going past which creates urgency
95. M these men whom she refers to we haven't been told who they are yet?
96. B it's only a segment isn't it
97. M so it's him sounds as if there is definitely some danger surrounding these men
98. B yeh
99. M but we don't know why

Text B *Famous Five* A Level Jim and James [pair 9]  
(to avoid confusion with initials these are given their full names)

**Jim**

1. A big frame A view going into the distance, going ahead, on the left hand side an
2. arch
3. on the right hand side leaves
4. right at the far end right in front of you people moving saying "heave"
5. a box, the levers and heave again in the next frame
6. "It's the treasure"
7. There's three people looking in and a dog

8. The next frame Right at the far end in front of you is a big church in the background,
9. in there are people buying in front
10. front of that is some houses, you've got a cathedral spire going right to the top
11. It looks like a French town very Gothic
12. The next frame is a close up view of three women the one in the middle is holding
13. fruit
14. and the girl looks astonished They are in a market. One of the women is saying
15. "just think only this morning I heard that two gangsters arrested have escaped from
16. the
17. prison hospital"
18. The next frame the girl on the right has vanished
19. the others look astonished there's
20. The next frame looks from behind a girl on a bike and she's thinking "I must hurry
21. and
22. warn the others they may walk into those men"

### **23. James**

24. sounds like some kind of crime thing the first frame and second scene where was
25. taking place, showing a quiet town, and goes into action
26. almost as though it is cut in part the way through a film as though following a story
27. line
28. so you get establishing shot and then so go back into the story line just as the three
29. people look astonished
30. possibly some cops and robbers thing but
31. if it was then maybe
32. It sounds like prison like some sort of wild west type
33. it sounds slightly weird, slightly out of place, with it sounds like slightly different to  
a
34. French style You said the it made it look slightly French
35. It seems to me that it is about two men in prison seem to be there, probably planning
36. another job
37. that's about it

Text C *Canardo* GCSE Hannah and Lyndsay [pair 5]

1. H Trees, branches, no leaves
2. dog - person with a big nose stood in front to left of tree
3. he's got a big nose and wearing a raincoat
4. bottom right hand corner some houses like a
5. he's standing looking down onto the houses
6. dark gloomy, cloudy
7. landscape grassy in front
8. looks quite empty, dark, really really dark clouds
9. the dog creeps up spies on the dog in purple
10. speech bubbles carry his thoughts "guess this must be the doctor's house"
11. The dog gets the other one "jeezus him too" there's something in his skull
12. here's a noise says "son of a bitch"
13. Possible narrative?
14. L I don't know
15. then something going on inside the house
16. When he sees it the dog he's shocked. He looks it and says "son of a bitch"

Text C *Canardo* GCSE Dan and Sarah [pair 6]

1. S There's a dog he's looking at a house
2. It's dark, spooky, like deserted
3. He's, the dog. he's thinking, speech bubbles. It's the doctor's house, and it's locked
4. up
5. He gets behind two other dogs and hears them talking so "he knows about my
6. escape" and he's thinking that
7. He's got a rope
8. He's got a knife
9. he's got
10. twisting the knife
11. D Which is first?
12. S You heard me
13. This has got to go before
14. he walks away then he's screaming
15. Then he's close-up and then he's screaming "son of a bitch"
16. he's just gone mad
17. D is it? what is it? What sends the dog mad?
18. S don't know can't see

Text C *Canardo* A Level Beverley and Gina [pair 7]

1. G I'm looking at a double page spread in this magazine. tree, a dog with a brown
2. satchel. The connotation is that this is a fairly old house, quite spooky,
3. I get this from the dark clouds in the background, the house is run down lots of ivy.
4. The tree is very spindly and the dog had a bemused expression on him ... would you
5. like to know what he's saying?

6. B What's he saying
7. G he's saying well thinking, guess this must be the doctor's house.
8. G The second frame we have virtually a silhouette of a wolf holding a stick with
9. trees in the background
10. B the wolf holding a stick
11. G yeh and this wolf is also wearing a long trench coat. The connotation here is that
12. he is sinister, because out of the darkness we can see his white eyes shining and he
13. seems to be frowning. In the background is like woods and there are speech marks
14. coming out of the wood saying Jesus this place is locked up tighter than a drum.
15. And the connotation here is that that was the dog from the previous frame saying
16. that from out of the bush, which probably means that this wolf is house breaker.
17. Third one a just a small one, close up of the dog's eyes, peering over the grassy
18. mold, connotation that he's slightly scared because his eyes are bulging and his
19. pupils are very small He's saying "Christ now I've got, the shakes what bozo said
20. the brave man was afraid before the coward during ". then it's dot dot dot . . . then it
21. goes onto the next phrase, the dog again um
22. now you see the dog in the coat with the bag, there are lines behind him so it looks
23. as though he's running or he's just jumped up that's what I'd [call] it anyway
24. I'm sorry I didn't mention that the dog has a cigarette in his mouth
25. B alright dog's smoking
26. Now he's saying "And the reckless one afterwards" and that's a continuation -so he
27. says "what bozo said the brave man was afraid before the during and the reckless
28. one afterwards".
29. B uh right
30. Then he says "Me I'm scared shitless all the time, I'm just the dumb puts who makes
31. a run for it So that supports that he's running then OK
32. The fifth frame , now, on the we have on the corner of the house on the left hand
33. side is the previous wolf with the stick, and he is talking to
34. B Is it a big stick?
35. G Yes like a walking stick, he's talking to a fat dog with a patch over his right eye in
36. a purple suit and brown suede boots
37. B purple suit
38. G yeh and on the right hand side of the corner is the previous dog, still coming from
39. behind him, so that he looks as though he's still running, so his feet are outstretched
40. looks as though he's just halted so he doesn't want to be seen by these two people
41. The wolf is still looking very evil with his eyes and the dog seems to be a bit shifty.
42. Do you want to know what he's saying'
43. B alright
44. G Better keep an eye out if you let him get away you can say bye bye to your fix,
45. that was the big purple dog
46. B right
47. B right
48. Final frame on this page The dog is thinking to himself, "so he knows about my
49. escape, wonder who tipped him off
50. That guards in my way that means he's history Kartler's leaving it's now or never"

51. And that is he's backed up against the wall so he's very close
52. G On the second page, the dog reaches into the brown back that he was carrying
53. and has taken out a piece of string or rope and he says to himself "good thing I
54. never leave home without my tools"
55. B right
56. G Next frame the dog is in mid-air, so it looks as though he's just jumped up, the
57. wolf
58. er oh hang on
59. The wolf, has I'm not too sure, has a very puzzled expression on him, but he's not
60. facing the dog so he's not seen the dog yet it I don't know if he's drunk or not and
61. in the next frame the dog has thrown the rope over the wolf's neck
62. B like lasso
63. G yes like lasso
64. And the wolf has a question mark first of all
65. And in the next frame the wolf is going "aarg"
66. B captures the wolf
67. G The wolf is clutching his throat his eyes are bulging, his tongue's hanging out and
68. his teeth is showing
69. B So he's strangling the wolf
70. G yeh the dog is saying "but a goody quite effective" the wolf from behind "takes
- me
71. back to Algeria"
72. B G laughing
73. B Next frame is just an elaboration to that wolf with bulging eyes, tongue hanging
74. out, the dog still behind him, strangling him with a rope
75. um oh then the dog says Jesus him too and he's got one of those horrible devices in
76. his skull poor bastard The wolf a patch of hair has been removed from the wolf's
77. head. There is a square of metal, I presume, because it's silver with three what looks
78. like buttons on them
79. B Device in his head
80. G In the next frame the dog says at least he won't be suffering any more, the wolf is
81. now on the ground eyes closed
82. B dead
83. G that's what I presume, he looks dead and says pah
84. B Sorry?
85. G Bah where he's fallen down
86. G The next frame is a long shot he's left the wolf and he's running around the side
87. of the house um it's very old house cracks in it old dead flowers, broken sort of
88. plant plot, leaves a drain barrel and he's saying "Now to find a way into this
89. dump" Looks as if he's running because he's got some lines coming out from behind
90. him penultimate frame is the dog looking at a wall with a slightly open gate in it he's
91. got three question marks coming from him because what are coming from behind
92. this wall are sound effects which are grrr eek clink
93. B Right so someone's fighting possibly
94. G ka Presume so yes last frame is a close up of his face he's got perspiration coming



95. from him, he's shaking and he's peering round the gate and he's saying "son of a
96. bitch" in big black bold writing
97. G so what do you think's happening here then?
98. B Well um obviously um it sounds very strange um it's obviously not realistic the
99. dog's
100. G If I told you the title of the book would that help? It's called Canardo a private
101. eye a shabby dog story that might help a bit
102. B right I was going to say it sound like a private investigator going into a the word
103. puts it sounds you know
104. I reckon private eye and his language is says um it's obviously some kind of a
105. conspiracy
106. and someone is brainwashing people with devices in the back of their heads
107. and he
108. G could be
109. B 's obviously trying to infiltrate this sort of set up to expose someone, they know
110. that he's escaped but he's been there before and they've captured him, and he's
111. tried to escape and they know he's escaped and they know and it's um
112. G there's a big boss and we know that because he says
113. B we know it's him it's him that's doing all the implanting of strange things in
114. people's heads or he's mastermind big dog with purple suit top dog basically
115. G and the patch over his eye that's quite
116. B yeh
117. G we know his name's Kartler
118. B he's still getting into the house to try to free people? Ho as well so others have
119. had this so maybe someone he knows in the house
120. G So what do you think's going on when he looks quite shocked when he says  
"son
121. of a bitch", he must have seen something like sort of quite disturbing or something
122. B yeh
123. don't know fighting someone who knows what's going on don't know
124. G those sound effects are quite queer
125. B dogs isn't it
126. G yeh so it's quite so it's a cartoon that they've taken a story line and they've just
127. made it into animals,
128. B yeh dog private eye investigate something to do with brain washing of some  
description
129. G OK

Text C *Canardo* - A Level James and Jim [pair 9]

1. This looks extremely funny,
2. The first frame is like we had before, it's a big frame taking up the width of the book
3. in top left hand corner it says
4. it says a little later with dots after it
5. It looks like one of those spooky ghost stories, it's a spooky house in front of you
6. being quite big, quite wide, many windows, blackened windows, the bricks are all red
7. the clouds are dark and grey, there seems to be a hill behind it going look to right
8. the right seems to be like a forest, quite a
9. straight in front of you to the right there's a big creaky old black tree with no leaves
10. and trunk going off at weird angles, to the left of the picture in front of us is
11. probably the hero, a dog of some sort with big ears it looks pretty stupid actually
12. with a green coat on and a brown satchel and he's standing behind a golden reddish
13. bush and he's thinking, "Guess this must be the doctor's house."
14. Oh just in front of the red house the big scary house, there's like a big brown oak
15. door an arch way, and in front of this is a tiny shadow with someone holding a stick.
16. The grass is darkish smerkish green with bits of mushrooms.
17. The next frame is a slightly shadowy one as if the light's in front of the man it
18. seems to be from inside the oak doorway, it's dog maybe a wolf character, with a
19. big green coat on an collar which is pointed up. The man's holding a stick, it's all
20. shadowy but behind him but in front of him is the forest where we were just before,
21. with all trees and stuff, oh and at the back of the picture you can just see the hero
22. who's crouched down in the grass thinking, "Jesus, this place is locked up tighter
23. than a drum"
24. That's it
25. Next frame, which is the hero looking in front of the hero towards him as if we're
26. don't worry about that
27. he's crouched down looking a bit scared in the grass,
28. and he's thinking "Christ now I've got the shakes what bo said was the brave man
29. was afraid before, the coward (j...)
30. and bushes and stuff behind him
31. the next scene ; next frame,
32. and the reckless one afterwards, scared shitless all the time the dumb pu ... who
33. makes a run for it and he's running out of the bush with sweat dripping off him and
34. he's running

35. Next frame, is the man who's standing in the doorway, he's now outside the  
 36. building, on a corner of the building and he's talking to a big black bulldog type  
 of  
 37. character, with a patch over his right eye and he's saying, "better keep an eye  
 out, if  
 38. you let him get away you can say bye-bye to your fix". He's in a purple garish  
 39. suite with a tie and stuff. It looking like a big fat man  
 40. and he then says, "and you know what that means."  
 41. The scary guy with a big green stick says, "I know boss don't worry", and you  
 can  
 42. see round the corner is the dog, the hero, he's just running, and he's just  
 stopping  
 43. and there's a big question mark, and he's saying,  
 44. The next frame is a close up of the corner  
 45. The scary man is round the corner facing towards us, and the hero is round the  
 46. corner really got close to the wall peering round it looking a bit scared, and he's  
 47. thinking "So he knows about my escape I wonder who tipped him off", and he  
 48. saying "that guard's awake, that means history,  
 49. I can't leave them it's now or never"  
 50. So the guy must be the guard.  
 51. Next frame still at the corner, and the dog's bending over opening the satchel;  
 52. and getting a bit of rope out of , saying "good thing I never leave home without  
 my  
 53. tools"  
 54. Right the next one, still on the corner, and he's jumped to a tree branch that was  
 55. sticking out of the wall for some strange reason just above his head. And he's  
 hung  
 56. onto it he's got the rope and the guard is still looking a bit dumb, facing towards  
 us  
 57. The next frame, the dog on the branch, got the rope made a lasso over it and  
 58. dropped it over the guy's neck, and he's now looking a bit dazed with a question  
 59. mark now and dog's licking, tongue sticking outside of his mouth,  
 60. Next one, the wolf character now is choked, his eyes are popping out and his  
 61. mouth's open and his tongue's coming out  
 62. Saying aagh, clutching his neck  
 63. The dog on the branch, pulled rope tight with a big grimace on his face, looking  
 a  
 64. bit happy about it, and he's going "aagh, an oldie but a goodie, quite effective  
 and  
 65. best of all from a . . . .  
 66. taking me back to Algeria"  
 67. and he's jumped up to the man  
 68. Next one - he's jumped onto the man and he's still choking him, and he says,  
 69. "Jesus him too, he's got one of those horrible devices in his skull poor bastard,"  
 70. oh and something's come off the top of his head, and there's a metal panel on the  
 71. top of his head  
 72. obviously  
 73. and then jumps on top of him and pushes him to the ground  
 74. and a big 'puff' sign and he's thinking "at least he won't be suffering it more"

75. Next one
76. a different area, he's running along the side of the house on this pathway. With a
77. window behind him, messy really
78. trying to find a way in to this
79. just runs along
80. and ends up to a big broken down big concrete garden wall, a bit cracked and stuff
81. and lots of question marks on his face, he looks a bit dazed, and then there's a big
82. wooden gates opened, and you hear these big gurring noise and he's also
83. wondering what's happening.
84. Then you see him up close he's looking towards us as if we're in the fence, and he's
85. looking through the door, startled "son of a bitch," startled oh he's got a cigarette
86. in his mouth, I've never noticed that before.
87. What do you think happens
88. (James) he's trying to get into the house but it's heavily guarded, it sounds like some kind
89. of detective thing because of what the dog is doing acting like a detective, I don't know
90. Sounds like he's pretty smart and he's got a few tricks up his sleeve
91. Sounds like he's quite violent as well, or he can be when he needs to be
92. The bloke he's out to get obviously a doctor, sounds like the bad guy, or otherwise
93. he wouldn't need all the protection around the place
94. that's about it

Text D ***Judge Dredd*** GCSE Mark and Ben [pair 4]

1. street rubbish
2. next frame a bug looking at us
3. Cockroach going towards others as if trouble
4. violence
5. the title frame The Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach aged 13 and a half
6. Judge Dredd walking through door with a big crash
7. two people behind look like bouncers with bow ties
8. I get this
9. he puts fingers on table and lifts in liquid
10. stuff on it
11. 'what kind of'
12. Judge Dredd looking at a cook
13. 'what kind of soup are you making pal? - Dandruff'
14. 'Get a hat on' (American accent)
15. Obviously dandruff going in soup
16. These guys aren't bouncers they're waiters
17. stuff behind doors

Text D ***Judge Dredd*** GCSE Hannah and Lyndsay [pair 5]

1. I don't know what it is
2. there's load of rubbish
3. L what type of frame
4. it's long rectangular
5. food spattering
6. over wall
7. next frame big close up fly same shape as last one - cockroach type
8. thing yes it is under crack in skirting board or hole or something
9. same as last (sa) back view of cockroach walking into right of frame and in left is 3 other cockroaches
10. next frame - a bit wider still rectangular Another cockroach in middle
11. of frame facing into 3 others around him eating something off the floor
12. big square frame - big tall bloke, metal gear bit like robot, massive
13. boots, helmet, gloves, top of an egg-shaped helmet
14. pushing barging door open - barges in
15. behind door - is like all this food rubbish, empty cans
16. next to him walking behind is waiters dressed like waiters, weird boots
17. in
18. Another bloke there He's waiter as well because he's got a bow-tie
19. Another rectangular frame, it's not landscape but portrait left hand
20. big frame wiping something off table

Text D *Judge Dredd* A Level Beverley and Gina [pair 7]

1. G OK Beverley on this page I have 9 boxes
2. I shall read to you what it says ok
3. (reads text)
4. B so mess on floor
5. G right - the denotation of this box is a wall with slime or some sort of
6. substance down it and an empty tin can
7. eight have you got box one
8. B okay
9. box 2 - I'll read what it says again
10. anyway by the time . . .
11. and the picture seems to be of a large insect
12. point of view
13. some sort of insects and it has long tentacles. It's not a fly because
14. it has long tentacles
15. in box number 3 there's we get a side view of this insect, I can now see
16. it's a cockroach and then in the background, there are three other
17. cockroaches
18. 4<sup>th</sup> box -(reads text) ...the picture is the last roach, which is the
19. main character, surrounded by smaller roaches, on some sort of mound or
20. something
21. Okay 5<sup>th</sup> box in bubble writing it says, the secret diary of Adrian
22. Cockroach aged thirteen and a half months
23. Okay the 6<sup>th</sup> picture the large picture. It features three people. The
24. large has a badge on him which says Dredd and he is wearing some sort of
25. uniform, a head piece, big shoulder thing, belt you know
26. Then the bloke behind it it seems to be very padded with knee pads and
27. things and there's a bloke similarly dressed to him as well
28. What are they doing, they are crashing through the door
29. I can see they are crashing through a door because it says 'crash'
30. And as they crash through a door, and what I can actually see here are
31. cans and overthrowing buckets and bowls
32. that's in the foreground overspilling splashes oh yes and there's a big
33. jar that says mayo on it
34. I will tell you, the person in the foreground, no the person in the
35. background, this is what they are saying
36. The person in the background with the padded dinner suit on is saying
37. 'I assure you Judge Dredd our kitchen is clean . . ' assure and clean
38. is in heavy type, yeah
39. And the person wearing the heavy type on it says 'I'll be the judge of
40. that' and I'll is in heavy type
41. B So the person in the uniform is obviously Judge Dredd
42. G We shouldn't make that assumption yet, but if he's calling him
43. There's a smaller frame it's a close up of the main character who is
44. Judge Dredd. It's a close up of his hand. You can tell because he

45. has very distinctive, knuckle pieces, and on his previous you can see
46. them on his gloves okay
47. B so it's
48. G And the finger has wiped itself through some sort of substance on a
49. table
50. Then in the background there are pots with overflowing substances . .
51. and a man wearing a chef's hat and
52. a chef's coat and jacket
53. Then there's a speech bubble pointing in a direction where the hand is
54. coming from and then there's a speech bubble pointing from the
55. opposite direction which says yes
56. Next picture 8 is the same hand a close up of the same hand but now it
57. is pointing upward with the finger which had previously wiped through
58. that substance and on the tip of that finger you can see the substance
59. that the finger has just wiped through and the person who belonged to
60. the hand is saying
61. It's grease creep (side 2 of tape)
62. and in the background of this hand is the person
63. now the final scene is the picture of the character Judge Dredd we can
64. tell that because he's wearing his badge He is in the background and
65. then there is a man in the foreground
66. He is holding a spoon which is in a bowl bubbling substance with steam
67. coming up from it
68. And the man has a bald patch
69. Judge Dredd is saying what kind of soup are you making Dandruff and
70. dandruff is in heavy type
71. then there is another little bubble which is all in heavy type which
72. says get a hat on
73. then underneath it says Judge Dredd and the Judge motif
74. B I'm not sure that the first part is linked to the second part, insects
75. telling stories but after gets through the diary obviously someone who
76. is doing a health inspection in a restaurant which is obviously not
77. clean
78. G obviously a menacing again a figure of authority
79. I forgot to describe it I said he had a headpiece, but his eyes are also
80. covered
81. B Ah so he's obviously a sinister figure of authority yes
82. G I believe that the two little stories are linked
83. It's an amusing tactic that these comics use, because the cockroach is obviously
- living on all the dirt in the kitchen isn't it
84. B Ah yes so 'cos it says good mess on the floor
85. G It set in the future isn't it, so that's why because I was confused by
86. the, they're quite smart dinner jackets, but they are all padded
87. aren't they
88. B yeh weird, you can tell it's futuristic . . comforting to know you'll

89. have cockroaches in the future
90. G So we can tell that is judge Dredd and futuristic and works there
91. B He looks like a waiter, it's the bow tie and the dinner jacket
92. and he's got the chef's outfit on that's a stereotypical chef's outfit
93. isn't it the jacket and the white hat
94. G And the way he looks bigger than everyone, towering over them, figure of
95. authority, big shoulder pads
96. in the first couple of ones if I wasn't very good on the study of
97. insects the only way I could have known is of the dirt if it hadn't
98. said cockroach
99. B it says cockroach
100. G the use of heavy type as well
101. B yes that's true
- G you can work it out the narrative

Text D *Judge Dredd* A Level Ben and Martin [pair 8]

1. M we seem to have snippets of two different articles maybe from a newspaper or
2. something
3. the Secret Diary of Adrian Cockroach
4. and there's four different shots
5. the first shot looks at on its own
6. B alleyway
7. no you can just see a tiny little low angle shot as if its
8. looking straight across the floor
9. so to create a very sort small scale feeling
10. B so what's in the alleyway
11. M there's shadows to right and left hand side
12. the part where's you're supposed to emphasise there's just rubbish and a hole on the
13. floor and old cans thrown everywhere and there's a quote at the side saying
14. "woke up late today I suppose it was staying so long at Pandrop's party Pandrop
- had
15. found a really good mess on the floor and we'd been eating it until the small hours"
16. right
17. It's obviously about a cockroach because of the title and Pandrop is supposedly one
18. of his friends, if cockroaches have friends, I wasn't aware of this
19. B I didn't realise that cockroaches had a social life
20. M I didn't realise cockroaches could talk
21. B so definitely to create a gloomy sort of atmos
22. M create a gloomy so very dirty kind of atmosphere
23. B even though skanky cockroach is happy
24. M well yes
25. and then I've just realised that this seems to zoom in on the second shot on the little
26. crack in the hole of the floor It must be a cockroach
27. There's a cockroach hanging out with its head and arms
28. B arms?



29. M legs, limbs whatever
30. and it says "anyway by the time I appeared out of my cranny I got my appetite back
31. B out of his cranny
32. M out of his cranny, yes I believe that this is way cockroaches describe the front
33. door to their abode,
34. B ok we've got that
35. M we've got a third shot here it's another low angle
36. B what was that shot?
37. M oh right yes sorry well I believe it just trying to set the scene to the cockroach is
38. now going to tell us about a day in its life
39. B skanky alley
40. M terrible is it
41. B you reckon that those two are establishing shots for the rest of parts
42. M I reckon they are establishing shots for the rest of the story
43. B ok next shot
44. M the next shot, you have a shot going from behind this cockroach or in front I  
can't
45. tell actually whether it's his head or its backside
46. And a load of other cockroaches in the corner, still a very shadowy and sinister *film*
47. *noir* setting
48. B so what's he doing
49. M he's just walking towards and there's a quote saying "the gang were already
50. up and about and join them for breakfast" so really
51. B it's skanky alley
52. M yes it's the same place but he's out of his hole now, out of his cranny
53. B alright
54. M what do you think that's trying to symbolise, basically that they don't lead very
55. exciting lives, cockroaches
56. B I do get the gist that it's not too
57. M you get to realise that all they do is eat basically and have parties at Pandrop's
58. house
59. The next shot is of Adrian climbing up a hill surrounded by other cockroaches are
60. what make up the gang
61. It's still a low angle
62. B like the others
63. M format like the rest
64. B quite low
65. M cockroaches are quite low generally, they average about 2 centimetres tall I think
66. B I'm glad you know about cockroaches
67. M I do I've studied them in great detail
68. B anyway let's get on
69. M anyway the cockroaches this one says
70. "I'm 13 and a half which is quite old for a cockroach so I'm big enough to make  
sure

71. I always get the tastiest bits. So this cockroach is maybe the leader of the gang which
72. he associates with. socialises with
73. B so what's in the picture? A load of cockroaches in the picture
74. M cockroaches surrounding a load of dirt which appears to be dirt, but could be
75. breakfast to them
76. B so eating dirt
77. M yes possible
78. B still skanky yeh
79. M yeh very
80. there're shadows around the top. Adrian appears seems to be quite high up in the
81. gang as he says he makes sure he gets the tastiest bits so maybe they all look up to
82. him and respect him
83. B they're still trying to create a gloomy atmosphere with skanky atmosphere
84. M yes that's true
85. B OK so move onto the next one then
86. M move onto the Judge Dredd one shall we, well first of all you have a low angle
87. shot of Judge Dredd walking in a door with two of his associates
88. B walking into or out of
89. M walking in a door the door's
90. he's actually, the door is flies open
91. actually the words 'crash' written on there, and he's standing tall and he's looking
92. rather upset and these two people walk along after them, appears that they are trying
93. to calm him down
94. One of them says "I assure you Judge Dredd our kitchen is clean"
95. and then he says "I'll be the Judge of that"
96. and it appears that his kitchen far from clean, as there are lots of old pots and pans
97. around and it hasn't been cleaned up for quite a while
98. B so there are lot of things in the picture to suggest it is dirty
99. M yeh well, down the sides of the door as the door was pushed open it pushed the
100. cans to the side
101. B how does the cookers, how do they look?
102. The people he's arguing with how do they look in comparison
103. M well they are shorter than him, obviously a status symbol
104. and one of them has got this body language, suggesting he's quite intimidated by
105. by the Judge
106. B what he's doing then?
107. M he's got his hands kind of in a sort of, a scared way, if he's trying to be nice to
108. Judge Dredd
109. B trying to suggest that Judge Dredd is obviously important
110. M obviously so they are quite scared of him
111. B is Judge Dredd the one who's opening the door with a crash?

112. So not only is he commanding objects physically with power, but he's obviously one of these people, so they are trying to do what he wants
113. M yes that's right
114. B so he's in complete control
115. of his environment
116. M this is true
117. and the next one is a very tightly compacted shot, I think it may be of Judge
118. Dredd's hand slamming down of the table and he's saying "what's this clean spray?"
119. and another person saying "er yes" in a quite of trembling way. But you don't
120. actually see any of their heads you can just see
121. B you can see Judge's hands
122. M it appears to be mess but it's quite hard to make it out clean spray
123. There's a bit of mess everywhere
124. B so the Judge's hand on the table
125. M with a finger pointing at something
126. B do you see this from in front or behind or what
127. M you see this from a low angle shot of his hand a very tightly compacted shot of
128. his hand, very dense
129. B I presume something on the table, there's something on the table clean spray
130. M mess on the table
131. well the Judge asks if it's clean spray and the man says "yes"
132. B asks what is clean spray
133. M what he is pointing to
134. B oh ok
135. M so he's obviously quite intimidated to these people, completely in control they're
136. obviously trying to
137. impress him by doing things the way he would want it done
138. and then in the next shot, there's a mid shot of Judge Dredd, it appears to be Judge
139. Dredd, now he's taken his helmet off. And his hands in focus with his head in the
140. background
141. B what's he doing?
142. M well he's holding his hand up and he's got a blob of some substance on the end of it
143. B at the end of his finger
144. M yes he's saying "it's greasy creep" so it's obviously found out that what he
145. thought was clean was actually grease, so the kitchen is not very clean
146. B what's the significance of him taking his helmet off?
147. M I don't actually realise well I thought it must be Judge Dredd the way he's saying
148. it, but in the next shot he's got his helmet back on again, so that's not possible
149. B so you don't think it's him (tape recorder is switched off)
150. Sorry I've just realised I've made a very big mistake with this shot I think this shot
151. what you are seeing is what Judge Dredd is actually seeing and he's holding his

152. hand up in front of his face
153. B so we've got a hand in front of his face
154. M dynamic shot across his hand and the other man who's the one who is supposed
155. to be impressing the Judge is standing in the background looking very petrified
156. I thought this was very strange because Judge Dredd would not be looking petrified
157. B How big is Judge's hand in comparison
158. M well the Judge's hand is bigger than the whole man altogether
159. B that's obviously another statement about his power
160. B Is there anything in the background?
161. M no nothing in the background, just shadow down below
162. B just shadows
163. M the next shot. The last shot. The Judge looking very angry with some other man,
164. B a different bloke
165. M a very unhygienic looking bloke
166. B why does he look unhygienic?
167. M he's just looking unshaven, and he's got crumbs and he generally doesn't look
168. generally clean and he's stirring the food and the food looks quite skanky
169. B why does it look skanky?
170. M just general, the pan is all bubbling, and there's all grime around the side of it
171. where it hasn't been cleaned, just generally signs of an unhygienic kitchen
172. B so what's this bloke doing?
173. M he's just stirring, looking
174. B is the judge in the picture?
175. M yes the Judge is in the picture in the background he's much taller than the man
176. again and has a much wider span than him
177. and he says "what kind of soup are you making pal dandruff"
178. and then there's another sort of derivatives of this it says "get a hat on"
179. B who's got to get a hat on?
180. M the bloke who's stirring the food
181. B the Judge is telling him to get a hat on
182. M so it's obviously just telling him about what he needs to do to keep his kitchen clean
183. B its emphasising the skankiness of the kitchen, every shot has done that
184. M every shot has actually depicted how unclean the kitchen is, how unhygienic is
185. B how forceful Dredd is
186. M yes how forceful and menacing Dredd is and how everyone else is intimidated by
187. him
188. and the fact that they don't really try to cover up that their kitchen is very unhealthy

Appendix 7**Guidelines Given to Students**

1. Sit opposite your partner with the tape recorder placed between you.
2. Switch on the recorder and check it is recording.
3. One person looks at the page from a comic without letting their partner see it.
4. This person describes what they can see to their partner. Use all the clues available, pictures, words etc.
5. The 'blind' partner can jot down notes and ask questions to clarify details
6. When you have finished describing the frame ask your 'blind' partner what they think the story is about.
7. In discussion suggest possible types of stories or outcomes from the one page
8. At the end you can both see the picture and discuss your reading of the text  
How effective has your description been? Did you use all the clues to help your partner. Did you misread anything? Why was this?
9. Try another page and swop roles.

## Appendix 8

### **Mapping**

#### Conventions used in mapping links between words and pictures

In this mapping the arrows indicate links or references observed in the transcripts between lines (represented by vertical arrows) and between systems. If in the discussion the words dominate the reading the letter 'w' was used first and 'p' if pictures were more dominant. Where a statement was felt to indicate inference rather than description a horizontal arrow is drawn to the second column. If the comment indicates narrative understanding a horizontal line is drawn to the third column. By comparing the maps and the frames of the texts across readers it is possible to visually identify similarities and differences linked to the verbal reading comments.

*Figures 8.1 to 8.11 Mapping students; readings around texts*

(N.B. all transcripts can be found in Appendix 6)

#### Text A

*Figure 8.1 Wendy and Carrie[A1]*

Lines	pictures/words	inference	critical point
1	p	→	
3/4	p	→	
5	p		
7	p	←	
12	p	→	

*Figure 8.2 Chris and Chris [A2]*

lines	pictures/words	inference	critical point
3	p		
5			
8	p	→	
13	p		

It can be seen from these two maps that although some inferences about the texts had been made they came from the images. This lack of using both signifying systems was further compounded by misunderstandings in narrative structuring and by the need to locate meanings into concrete experiences. The frames are also discussed in isolation, so they do not take information forward. The links backward in [A1] are related to comments made by the teacher/researcher in order to try to encourage more talk (see transcript lines 2, 8, 13, 19). This does not mean that the links had not been made by the reader but they needed help to verbalize what they could see.

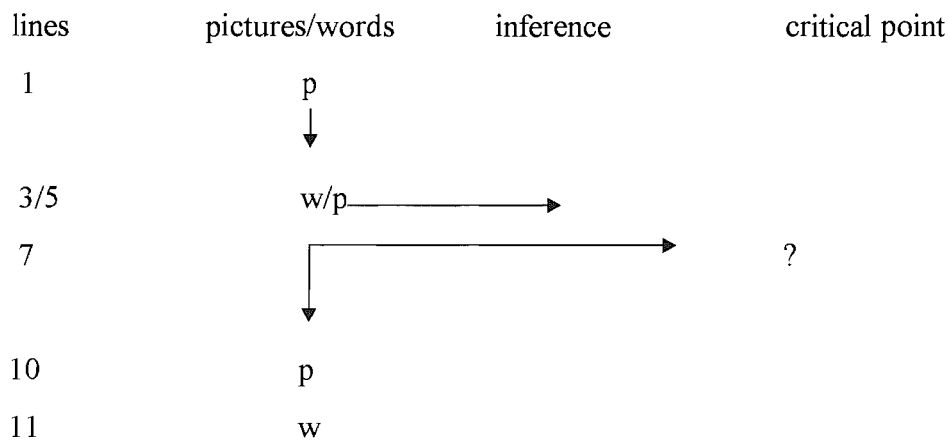
### Text B

*Figure 8.3 Dan and Sarah, [B6]*

lines	pictures/words	inference	critical point
2		→	
3	p		
6	↓	→	
8	w	→	
	p		
	↓		
12	w	→	

Although a brief discussion, it appears that the inference from the reading of the word ‘treasure’ in line 8 and the implied reading of the words in frame 5 mean that the critical point of understanding comes at the end and is linked to the words. There is no attempt to link explicitly the two ideas represented by the words ‘treasure’ and ‘prison escape’, and therefore the completeness of understanding cannot be judged.

*Figure 8.4 Mark and Ben [B4]*



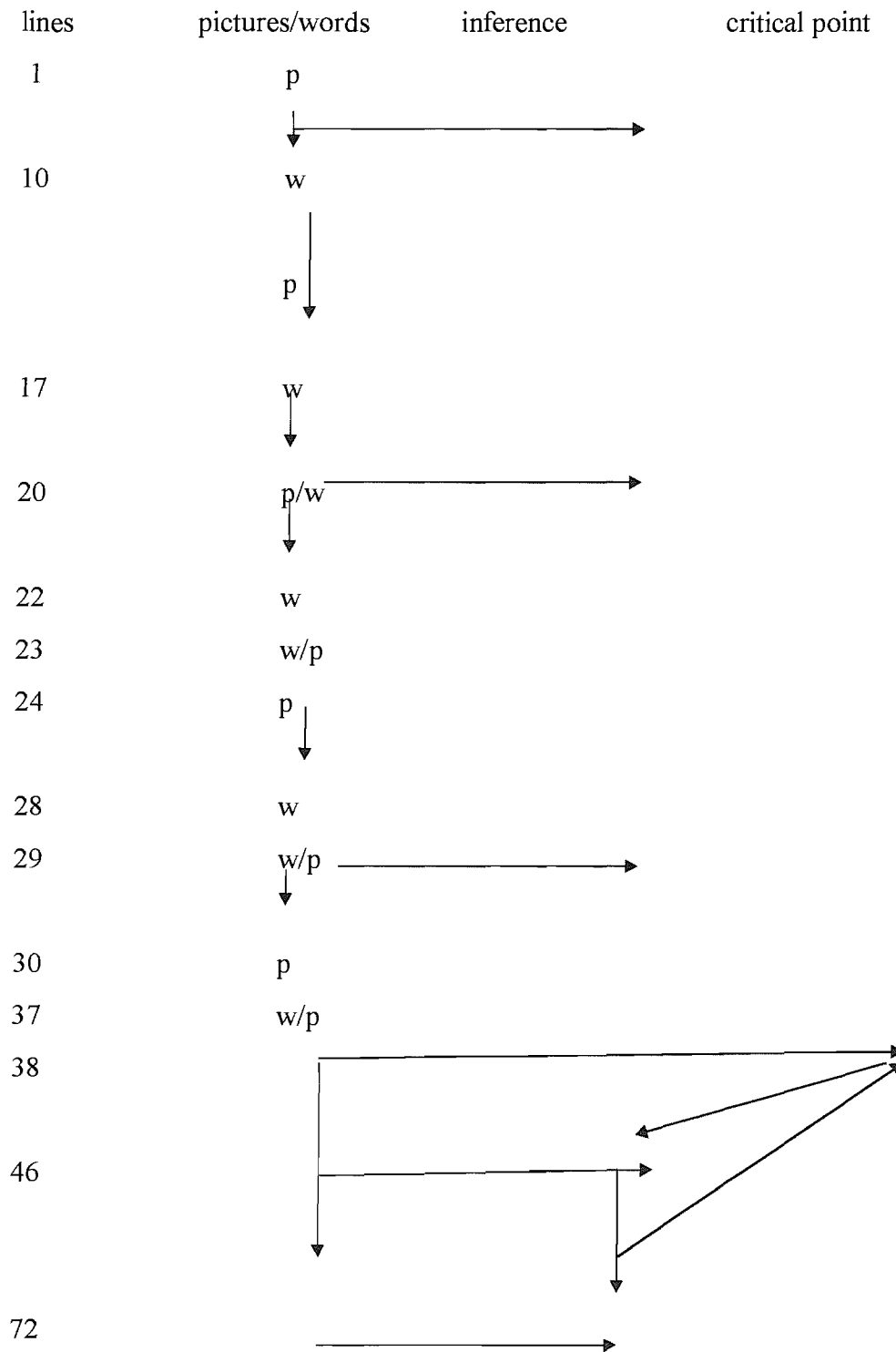
Mark and Ben appear to reach a critical point. At line 7 the reader indicates they can see that they have moved in terms of setting, “Is this a totally different story?” Because of limited evidence it is debatable whether this is a critical point. Again the word ‘treasure’ [5] in frame 3 is picked out as significant. The words are left to be read at the end of the description and are therefore not linked to the pictures in any meaningful way. This apparently separate reading makes it difficult for the ‘blind partner’ to achieve any textual coherence and he therefore does not contribute to the discussion.

With pair 6 and pair 4 the point at which the inference comes is where the words narrowed down the options opened by the images. A similar process can be seen with the A level pair, Gina and Beverley [7] but because they have a longer discussion the



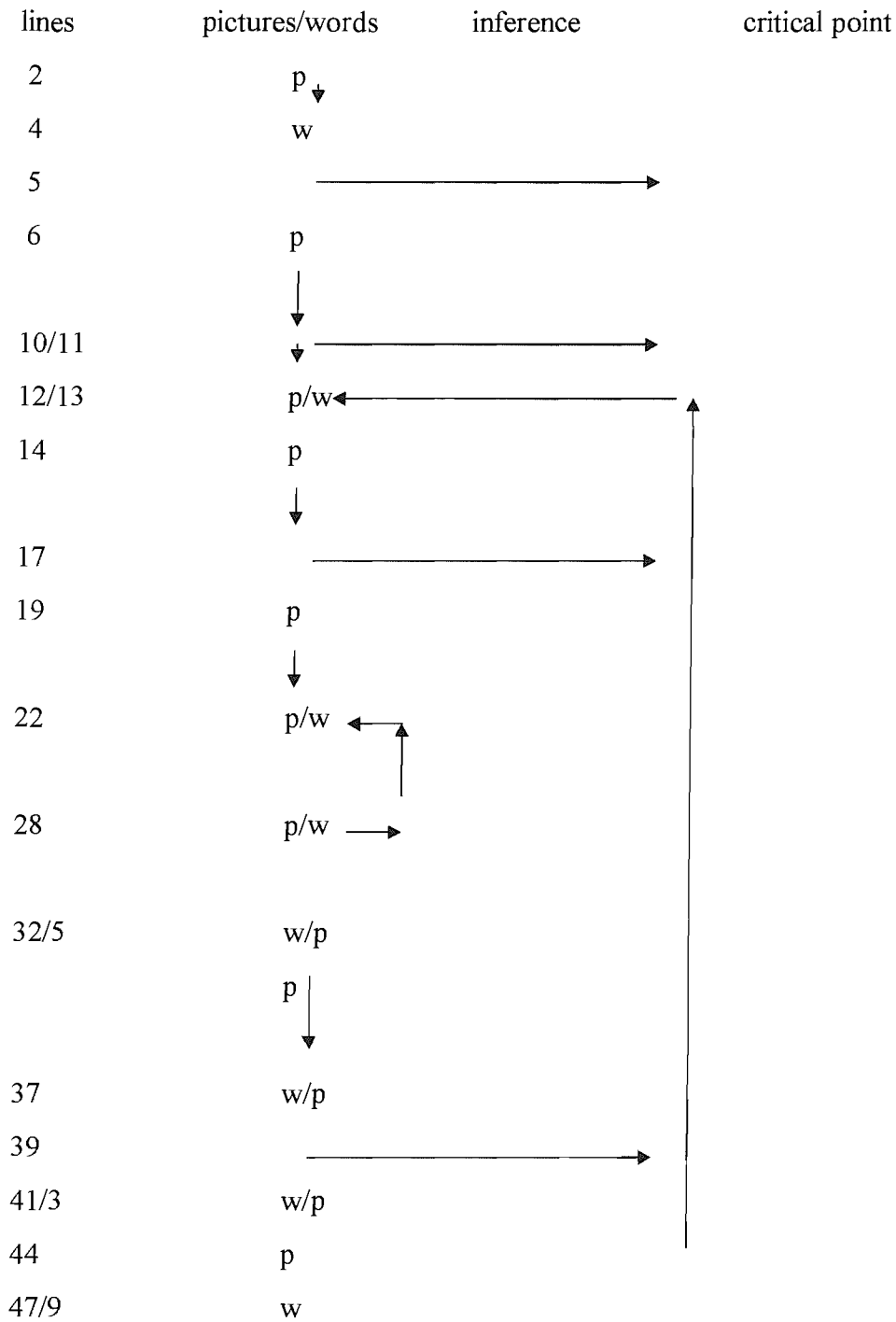
reading processes can be more clearly seen. This means the maps are more complex. This also reflects their more sophisticated response to the texts.

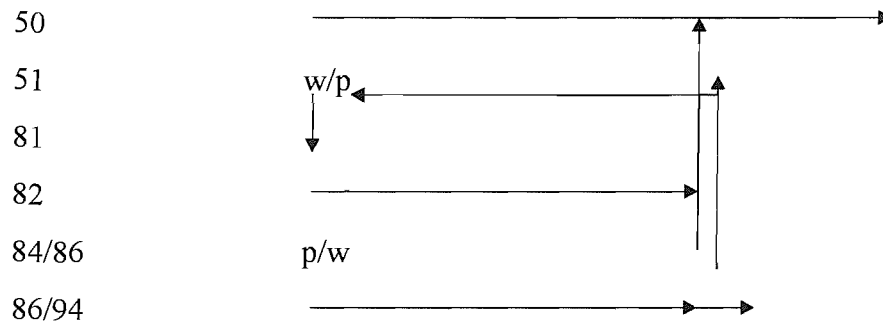
*Figure 8.5 Gina and Beverley [B7]*



In their reading once the critical point has been verbalized, the discussion ranges rapidly between references to the words, the images and inferences. The complexity of the map is reflected in the accuracy of their reading.

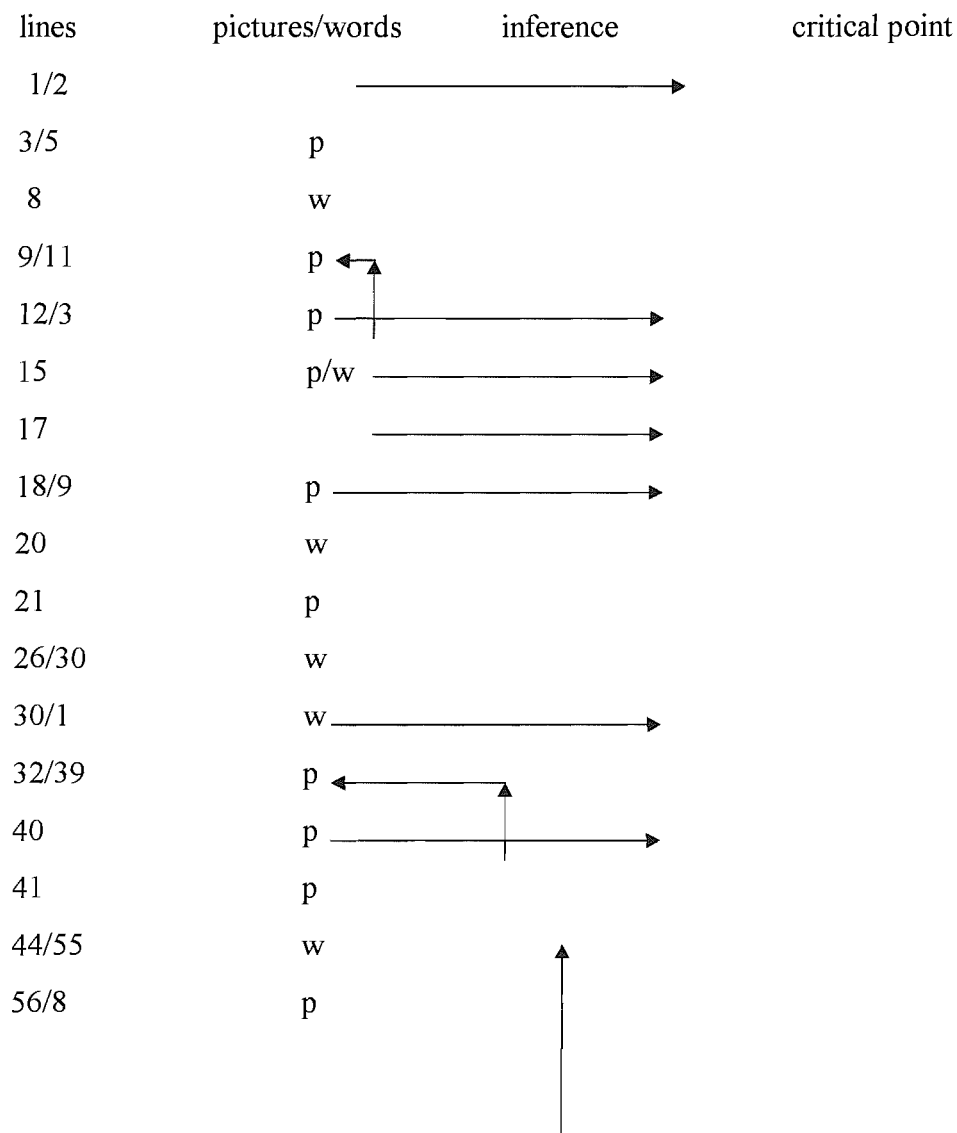
*Figure 8.6 Jim and James [C9]*





Jim and James [9] in a similar style to Gina and Beverley make inferences when the words confirm the possibilities suggested by the images, that is depiction and description are combined. Their style appeared to be more frame-by-frame than the other pairs. On the other hand the mapping diagram interestingly reveals that they were using a similar switching process between pictures and words to the other A level pair.

*Figure 8.7 Gina and Beverley [C7]*



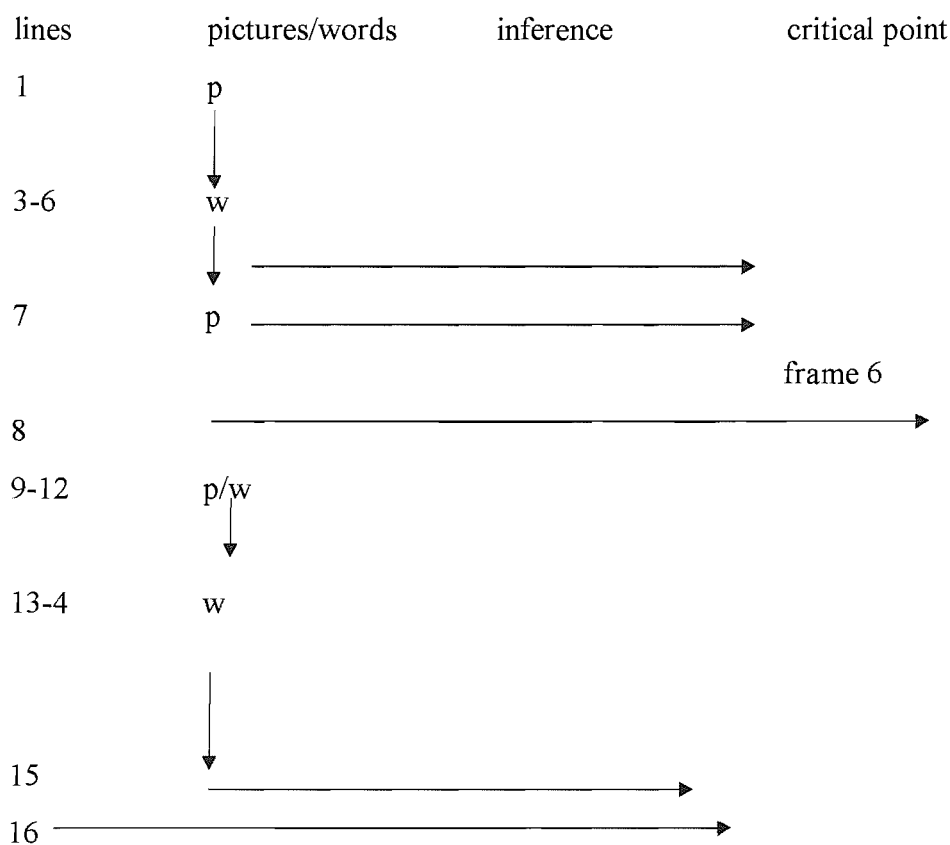
59	w/p
61	p →
64	p →
68/74	p
74/5	w
77/8	p
79/80	w
81/3	p
84	w/p ← ↑
87	p →
90/92	p
93	w
94/101	p/w ← ↑
102	p/w
107	→
110	→ ↑
103-137	p/w →

With the *Canardo* story the more enigmatic style and more complex written language meant that inferences were made frequently by the readers, as can be seen by Gina and Beverley during their reading. These were accurate but the pair did not suggest in their discussion that they had reached the critical point until much later than Jim and James. Although Beverley's comment, "right I was going to say." [C7, 107] suggests that she had reached the point earlier than indicated on the tape and I have suggested the point as frame 5 from her comments. This interpretation indicates the difficulty in trying to assess the primary responses of readers through their secondary responses of speech. It may have been possible to recapture this point in discussion with Beverley after the recording.

As has been noted the *Judge Dredd* story proved more challenging. Pair 8 ‘cheated’ by switching off the tape recorder so that their conversation and what they were actually doing are not recorded on the tape. Pair 5 failed to reach the critical point in understanding. Pair 4 see the two stories but fail, like pair 8 to link the two. Only Beverley and Gina, pair 7, appear to have made the connection when Gina says, “I believe that the two little stories are linked.” [D7, 82] This is confirmed when she goes on to say, [D7, 83-4] “It’s an amusing tactic that these comics use, because the cockroach is obviously living on all the dirt in the kitchen isn’t it.”

#### Text D

*Figure 8.8. Ben and Mark [D4]*



In Ben and Mark’s reading the critical point at line 8 is reached in understanding the Judge Dredd story, but not the Adrian Cockroach story. It is the picture of the Judge which is obviously known to the reader that makes it possible for him to begin to make meaning of this part of the story, even though there are some mis-readings, such as

interpreting the dress signifiers of white shirt and bow tie for ‘bouncers’ in line 7. But this is rectified in line 16 “These guys aren’t bouncers - they’re waiters”.

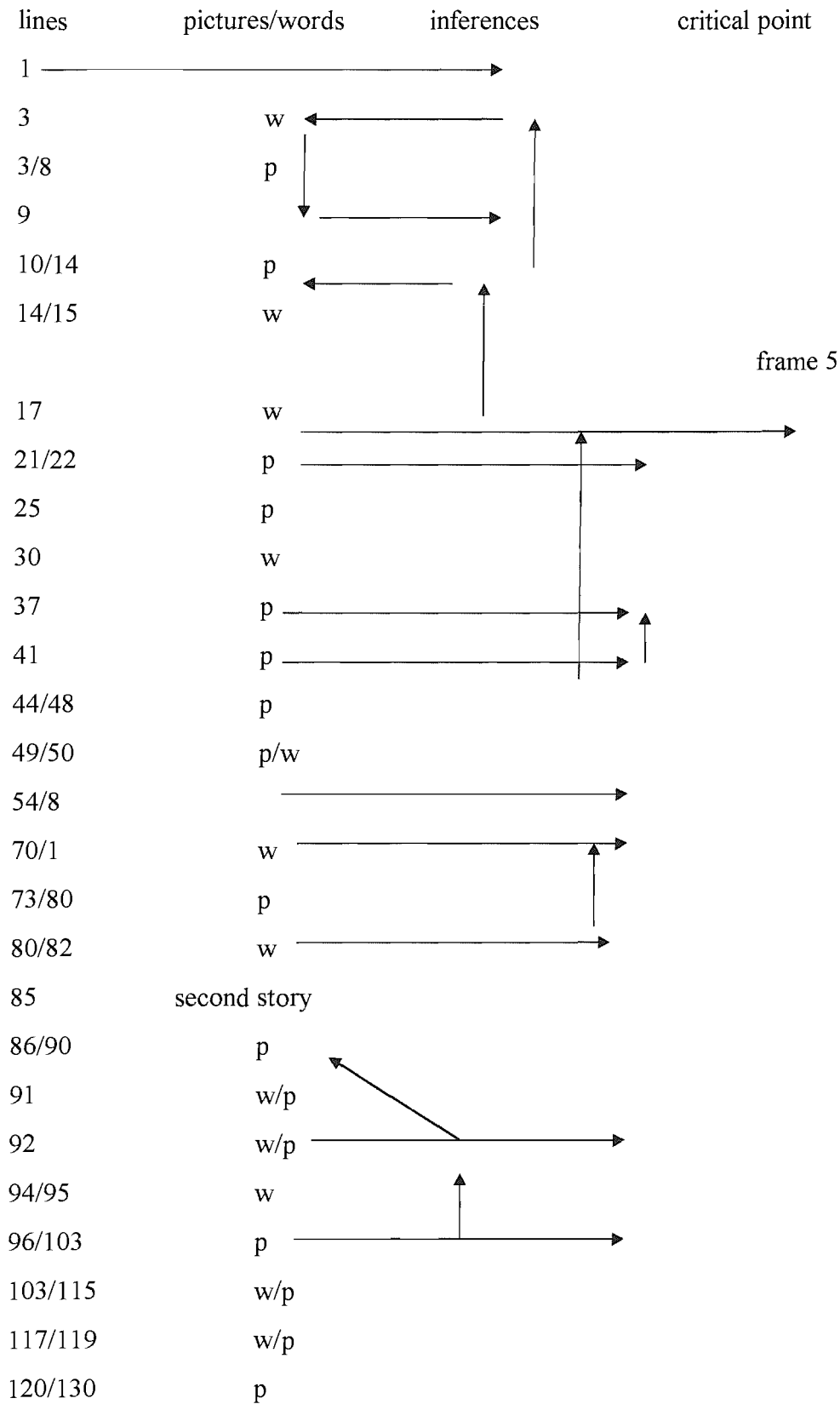
But the other GCSE pair fail to reach any critical point during their reading. They make no link between the words and images and this lack of relay is reflected in the lack of comprehension. Hannah is reading to Lyndsay.

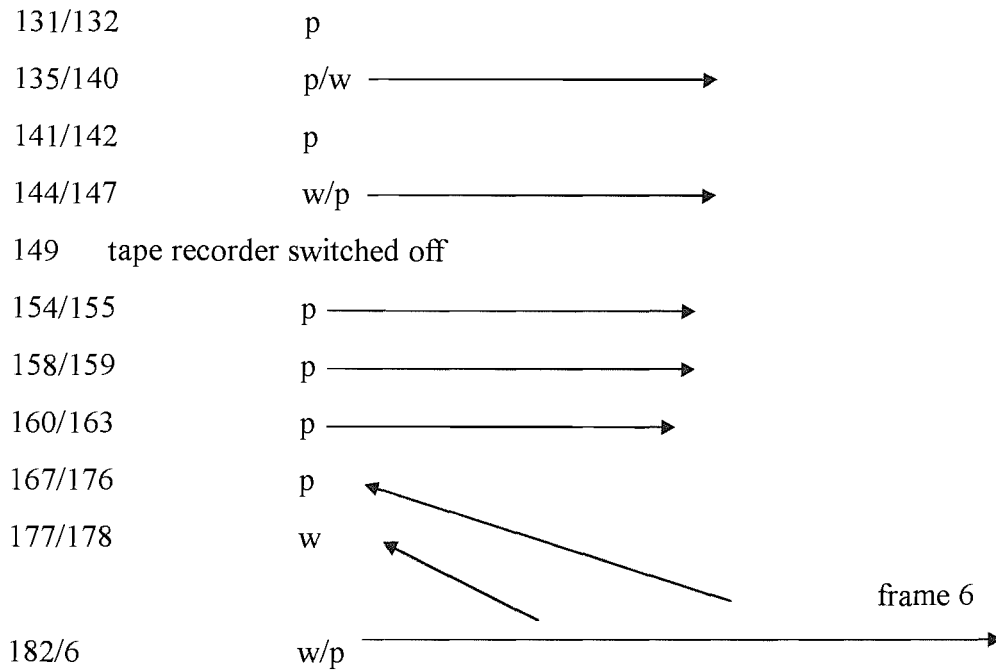
*Figure 8.9 Hannah and Lyndsay [D5]*

lines	pictures	inferences	critical point
1			
2/6	p		
6	p/w		
7/12	p		
12	p	↓	→
13	p		
14			
16	p	→	↑
17			
18	p	→	
21	p	→	
22/30	p		
31	p	→	
32/34	p		

Hannah’s reading focused upon the images. The only reference is to the word ‘cockroach’ which means that she read the title frame 5, but because she does not link the images to the words she appears to be unable to construct any narrative. Certain inferences are made from the images about the role of the various characters in the Dredd part of the story from their dress (Barthes’ secondary codes). No inferences are made at all in the discussion of the first cockroach narrative.

Figure 8.10 Ben and Martin [D8]





Ben and Martin appear to have two critical points which refer to the apparent separate stories. Like the previous pairs the link between the two narratives is not made. The first part of the discussion reveals the use of links between words, images and inferences showing that the story is being understood through a complex relationship of depiction and description, that is relay. The confusion over the apparent discontinuity between the cockroaches and Judge Dredd means that the second story languishes into a frame by frame description. Attempts are made to link between the words and images which would help to create a coherence in the narrative, but eventually frustration sets in and they turn off the tape-recorder. When it is turned back on it is obvious that there has been collaborative talk to clear up the problems.



*Figure 8.11 Gina and Beverley [D7]*

lines	pictures/words	inference	critical point
1	w		
3/4	p		
5/10	w		
11	p		
12/14	p	→	
13	p	←	
15/20	w/p		frame 5
21/22	w		↑
23/28	p		
29	w/p		
30/36	p		
37/40	w		
41	p/w	→	
44	p	→	
45/52	p	→	
53/60	p	→	
61	w		
62/63	p		
64	p	→	
66/69	p	←	↑
70/73	w		
74		→	
76/99	p/w	→	
83/85		→	
98/102	w	→	

The early part of Gina's discussion up to line 22 where she finishes the cockroach story shows that she has not made any real progress with the dual structure. There is a movement between words and images which will help her to build coherence in the text.

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