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Multiple readings of a picture book



Greer Johnson

This article provides a demonstration for literacy teachers across tertiary, secondary, primary and early childhood classrooms of how multiple readings of Libby Gleeson's (1992) picture book Mum Goes To Work can be produced. Specifically, Johnson explores four readings of the text, pausing at times to defend particular reading strategies or practices used in the production of different readings. The first three readings focus on the author, the text and the individual reader respectively. However, the central focus of the article is on a fourth reading of the picture book, produced from a world context or critical literacy approach. Each approach offers readers further possibilities for understanding texts.

Introduction

A focus on multiple readings paths is necessary if teachers are to expand students' understandings of the perennial question, what is (good) literature? The answer lies not in traditional analysis of an appropriate canon of texts but in readers' defensible understanding of a range of reading practices that provide different textual interpretations. Knowing and showing how reading practices are generated from traditional and contemporary literary theories is integral to a re-conceptualisation of an appropriate literary and literacy curriculum for the new millennium.

Recent developments in English curriculum, for example, the Queensland *Trial Senior Syllabus in English Extension (Literature)* (BOSSSS, 1997), have prompted teachers and teacher educators to re-conceptualise the nature of textual analysis. Textual interpretation was once thought to be generated solely from readers' aesthetic knowledge: a tool for unlocking meaning from inside the text, which in some cases was thought to be intentionally put there by the author. Teachers and teacher educators are now looking beyond traditional literary theory for new ways of understanding texts with their students. Specific direction is available from recent developments in literary theory, especially those related to poststructuralism. Language and literacy practices

that accompany poststructural literary theory encourage readers to generate meaning at social, ideological and political levels. As a starting point, Kress (1985) directs readers to examine the treatment of the topic of the text and investigate alternative ways of writing or speaking about it. Readers' consideration of the following points derived and expanded from BOSSSS (1997: p. 23) enables them to question the ideological nature of texts and recognise that reading is a social practice.

- Whose experiences and what kinds of experiences are given privileged voice in the text?
- What cultural and ideological assumptions (discourses) support the text, i.e., what assumptions about gender roles or relationships, social class, age, social customs or cultural identities are implicit in the text?
- Are the cultural and ideological assumptions on which the text is based consistent or are there traces of conflicting discourses?
- How are the cultural and ideological assumptions constructed through the text's use of language, literary devices and writing strategies, genre?
- What alternative cultural and ideological assumptions have been left out or silenced in the text?
- How has the text been shaped by the cultural context in which it was produced?
- How does the text position the reader to accept its cultural and ideological assumptions?
- How do readers produce multiple readings of texts? Why is my reading different from someone else's reading?
- What is a resistant or oppositional reading and what purpose does it serve?
- Why does the author's intention not matter when reading using this approach?

Children's literature was once seen solely within the domain of early childhood. There it provided the child with enjoyment through the world of the imagination and fostered a love of reading. For some time now, children's literature, and that written for young adults, has become a popular tool for the explication of literacy practices in the secondary curriculum. Increasingly parallel attention has been given to these texts in the tertiary classroom, especially in pre-service teacher education courses where they have been used to demonstrate literary devices and innovative narrative structural organisation. Another important function of texts written for children and young adults is their ability to support a variety of readings practices based on contemporary as well as traditional literary theories. A recently published and potentially influential text on children's literature by Saxby (1997)

offers teachers some directions for producing readings one, two and three. Significantly, a teacher/reviewer of the book, van Putten (1998: p.178), laments that it contains 'no mention at all of the enormous influence that Marxist-feminist theory, in the shape of "critical literacy", is currently exerting at all levels of schooling, beginning with the very earliest'.

The following section provides a demonstration of how multiple readings of a recently published picture book are produced, with a special focus on the production of readings based on the tenets of critical literacy.

Producing and defending multiple readings of a picture book

Mum Goes To Work (Gleeson, 1992) is about mothers who leave their children at a modern child-care centre while they engage in a variety of non-managerial occupations. A male and a female carer run the centre. The mothers are not identified by name, but from the visual images it is clear that they are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Once the reader is oriented to the topic, a day at the child-care centre, the book is structured as a sequence of eight specific mother-child stories. Each story is given a double page. These stories are interspersed with a number of double-page openings showing mothers and children participating, respectively, in general activities such as having lunch in the park and engaging in sleep time. Within each of the stories there are parallels drawn in the printed as well as the visual text between the mother's daily activities, on the left, and those of the child, on the right. In the top left-hand corner of all of the mothers' sides of the double-page spreads is a portrait-like illustration of mother and child having fun together. This image is paralleled on the right-hand side of the double page with another portrait-like image of the child having fun with either the male or female carer at the child-care centre. Overall, the book catalogues the happy daily activities of the mother and child in tandem. The daily 'work' of both proceeds without complication and the mothers collect their children at the end of the day.

This article now discusses briefly the first three readings based on author-centred, text-centred and reader-centred approaches respectively. This discussion facilitates a comparative focus on the fourth, most recent approach to reading texts, a world-context approach, also known as critical literacy. Each reading offers readers different ways of understanding the text.

An author-centred approach: Reading 1

In this approach, literature, defined as a selected body of canonical texts, becomes a resource for distilling the thoughts of great writers about the human condition. A single preferred reading of a text is produced when readers 'focus on the author's mind' (Eagleton, 1996: p. 2) to discover the intended universal themes s/he wishes to convey: central ideas that are considered important to the human condition. Themes are understood to reside inside a text and the reader discovers them by matching knowledge of an author's views and aspects of his (auto)biography with a close reading of the language and structure of the text. When reading from this approach themes are considered to be fixed. All well-trained readers find a similar theme. The authors' minds are more often than not white, middle-class and male and mostly the origin of the selected texts is British or American. Selected texts are believed to have stood the test of time because they uphold world views and values that are considered by authors and their critics to exemplify the right and proper way for all people to act; often the books selected to be analysed in this manner have won multiple literary awards. This method of analysis of fiction is referred to as English criticism, as set out in Leavis (1932).

When compared with its adult counterpart, literature for children has built up a smaller but still very influential canon of texts (see Saxby, 1997). Theoretically, *Mum Goes To Work*, by a female Australian writer (Gleeson, 1992), is not a canonical text, but in the relatively recent field of Australian children's literature new authors are admitted to the canon yearly. By winning the prestigious award for multiculturalism, Gleeson's text has attained status and the author's views are sought in media interviews and included in academic journals. It is in such a journal interview that Gleeson gives her readers a brief insight into how her intentions as an author are realised textually. Speaking to Cusworth (1996: p. 45), Gleeson states:

I also happen to be a fairly moral person [...I'm feminist, p. 53]...so a lot of my own personal ethics are in the stories, but I certainly don't set out to say: I want to write a book about 'x' and that's my only purpose. Issues and other ideas are invested in all of those works, but the most fundamental issue is about my need to explore ideas through story and language.

Despite Gleeson's thoughts about morality and textual devices lacking specificity, it is still possible for readers to use them to justify an interpretation of the author's intended meaning in her picture book. For example, a preferred or intended reading of this text using the author-based approach might be as follows.

In Mum Goes To Work, Gleeson (1992) reinforces through textual choices, such as repetitive incidents and a consistent third person point of

view (the author's voice), the key theme that all mothers offer their children unqualified love and care. This is an authorially approved reading as it can be linked to the author's public admission of a concern with morality. This traditional and primary role for mothers is endorsed throughout the written and the visual text in that the mothers in the picture book happily indulge in play with their children at home, even after a long day's work. The written text and the illustrations also support a second, related theme: that modern mothers often work outside as well as inside the home. Again this theme can be seen as authorially approved, linked to the author's public acceptance of feminism. The author's treatment of the second maternal role supports the first theme in that Mum accepts the responsibility for making and maintaining appropriate child-care arrangements if she works outside the home. These roles and themes are emphasised further in that there are no fathers who drop off or pick up their children from the child-care centre.

The author-centred reading practice is the traditional means of interpreting texts and is situated within a Western 'literary heritage' framework of literacy in general and the subject English in particular (Watson, 1994: p. 33). This approach is probably the most familiar way for teachers to interpret literary texts. However, it is no longer seen as the most important or even the most socially responsible way. In this picture book the linking of aspects of Gleeson's autobiography to the text produces a preferred reading that includes a mix of traditional and non-traditional views of motherhood. These views remain unchallenged if we read the text using the author-centred approach exclusively.

A text-centred approach: Reading 2

Aspects of a second approach (text-centred) to literary analysis accompany an author-centred approach. In approaches one and two, meaning is linked to the reader's recognition of aspects of textuality. In a text-centred approach literature becomes a linguistic puzzle, although the overall purpose of textual analysis is still the production of a preferred or fixed reading that supports universal themes and socially acceptable moral viewpoints. Themes are unlocked through the reader's application of a wide knowledge of literary devices and the structural organisation of the text (Eagleton, 1996). This approach also is situated within a 'literary heritage' curriculum framework (Watson, 1994: p. 33). The text is considered a 'verbal icon' (Wimsatt, 1954) and there is an exclusive focus on the words on the page and not on the author's intentions or the reader's personal or ideological view of the world s/he brings to the text. Traditionally this approach also has been applied to the readings of canonical texts since these texts are considered to be exemplary in their use of literary language.

The following is a brief, but defensible, preferred text-focussed reading of *Mum Goes To Work*.

Although Australian mothers come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds they all share a common characteristic. They are active, caring persons at home with their children as they are at work.

This is a reading which essentially supports the universal themes and moral lessons produced in the author-centred reading. That is, that the central value of a mother in family life is to give unqualified love, and that modern mothers have the right and responsibility to work inside and outside the home but are still primarily responsible for their children's well being.

Again a text-based reading is defensible through a close reading of the language of the text, often with a focus on literary devices. Here a justification for first two themes is made through the compilation of a lexical analysis, as used by Kamler (1994), supported by added attention to textual features such as narrative structure, including the visual text. The analysis of the images is derived in part from the methods of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). In order to produce a text-based reading, the following lexical analysis (Table 1) concentrates first on the text's use of participants (nouns) and the processes (verbs) in relation to the key protagonist, Mum. These methods of analysis justify the active and caring roles Mum takes up at home and in the workforce, especially as a mother of a new baby, a children's nurse and as primary school teacher. Overall, the agency that Mum holds is always seen in relation to what she can do for others, with a special focus on small (needy) children.

Table 1: A lexical analysis

Participant (Mum)	Processes
Max's mother She	is a nurse gives the patients their medicine makes them comfortable talks to the doctor
Rosie and Jack's mother She	works at home with new baby feeds and bathes washes his nappies tidies the house takes him shopping in the pram
Khen's mother She	is a teacher helps the children prepares work for the next morning

The structural unity of the written text also is very important to the production of a preferred reading. The preferred reading of Mum as a caring, supportive person at home and at work is reinforced through repetitive patterning of topic and structure in the 'Rosie and Jack', 'Max' and 'Laurence' sequences. In those stories in the book where Mum is not working in an acknowledged caring profession she is shown to be working in a clothes factory (Laurence's mother), in the supermarket (Brigit's mother), for the council as a secretary (Louis' mother), or as a gardener (Georgia's mother), again all 'public' service roles.

An analysis of the book's multiple visual images supports the preferred reading offered in the written text's themes. First, the small, close-up, portrait-like visual inserts of mother and child in the stories support the view that all Mums are loving. In these images, which appear in the top left-hand corner of the double page, mothers and children are physically linked; holding a book they are reading together, kissing, hugging, playing, drinking, eating and writing.

The application of of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) analytic concepts of 'Given' and 'New' to the physical layout of the images on the page offers further support for the preferred reading. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: p. 55) propose:

What is positioned on the left is presented as 'Given', as information that is already familiar to the reader and serves as a 'departure point' for the message, while what is positioned on the right is presented as 'New', as information not yet known to the reader, and hence deserving special attention...

When applying these concepts to the picture book it is a given that all mothers love and care for their children on a daily basis. Sharing this role with child-care workers is new, but the body language displayed in visuals (the happy children being well cared for away from their mothers for the working day) shows that this practice is approved. The shared subject matter of the mother stories on the left-hand side of the double pages with the child stories on the right-hand pages signifies the emotional bond between mothers and their children, even when they are physically separated.

For the most part, the visuals are 'congruent' with and thematically supportive of the written text. However, in one important way the two are 'divergent' (Sipe, 1998). A further focus on the visual images of the mothers supports a related theme: that multiculturalism, especially among mothers and children, is an accepted and unproblematic part of the Australian way of life. It is only through reading the pictures that the text shows the racially different physical characteristics of the mothers. If we privilege the

written text, the only (unreliable) indication of ethnic difference is perhaps the children's names.

So far the readings produced are derived from traditional approaches to textual analysis. These readings rely on the reader's acceptance that s/he brings to the text an uncritical acceptance of the author's worldview and/or an understanding of how textual organisation and literary device are used to mould thematic content.

A reader-centred approach: Reading 3

Yet a different understanding of the picture book is possible with the application of a reader-centred approach. Here the reader does have a central part to play in the meaning-making process. An important difference between this method of textual analysis and that offered by the previous two is that meaning is no longer seen as locked inside the text. A key understanding based on the work of Rosenblatt (1978) is that readers bring their individual experience to the text: they transact with the text in a subjective manner. Therefore, the purpose of analysis is no longer the production of a single preferred reading. Readers now have a choice to read *with* the text and/or *across* it. Although the text encourages readers to become the 'implied reader' (Iser, 1974) and therefore produce an ideal or preferred reading, there remains the option to disagree with the text and produce an alternative (across) reading. In the production of both ideal and alternative readings two readers read the same text even slightly differently because the readers' individual experiences will highlight different themes. Although readers are encouraged to produce a variety of readings it is also acknowledged that these are limited by groups of readers sharing cultural experiences and methods of readings. These limitations are outlined by Fish's (1980) concept of 'interpretative strategies' (see also Eagleton, 1996: pp. 74-77).

This reading approach enables literature to become a resource for personal growth. It is seen often as a very natural way for readers to talk about texts and is located within a personal growth curriculum framework (see Dixon, 1969). Until relatively recently this approach has underpinned the reading of texts in primary and secondary classrooms and is supported by influential research in the field (Thomson, 1987) and the practical application of research in textbooks such as Hoogstad (1987). Within this approach the definition of what actually constitutes literature expands from canonical to the popular, so 'quality' literature is no longer the primary motive for textual selection. Reading literature this way helps readers to construct a personal identity through processes such as analogising and identifying with characters and events in

the text. Reading becomes a subjective activity because an interpretation of the text is based on readers relating, or not, to the experiences represented in the text. When readers relate to the text positively they produce a preferred reading; when they do not, an alternative reading is the result.

A *preferred reading* (Moon, 1992: p. 104), in which the reader becomes the 'implied reader' (the reader for whom the text is ideally suited), is based on a match between the experience conveyed in the text and that of the reader. The following is an example.

As a single working mother from another country I can easily identify with the mother's experience of leaving their children at a child-care centre. I found the written and the visual text collaborated to reassure me that the children were all very happily engaging in educational play while their mothers worked at jobs away from them.

This reading supports the readings produced using author and text-centred approaches and shows how different approaches to reading the same text can result in the same reading.

On the other hand, an *alternative reading* (Moon, 1992: p. 104) is different because the personal is taken up as social and cultural knowledge. An alternative reading produced by a middle-class, working, married mother might be as follows.

I could not identify even vicariously with the contented Mums in the stories. Rather, I read this text against a feature article by Olsson that appeared in the Courier Mail (14/11/98) titled The universal mother. This article began:

She [mother] is expected to be all things to everyone. Devoted not just to her children, but to her role and to embody all the qualities associated with femininity — nurturing, intimacy and softness. Such is the myth of motherhood and the 'perfect mother'. But just how fair or realistic is that?

Alongside the picture book and the newspaper article I placed a third text, my own lived text as a working mother. Reading the three texts intertextually enabled me to make an alternative reading which centred on the guilt and sheer exhaustion that often engulfs the working Mum.

A reader-centred approach to textual interpretation encourages the reader to become consciously aware of and reflexive about reading practices (Thomson, 1987) that support the production of preferred or alternative readings. For example, the preferred reading relies in part on the reader's acceptance of assimilation for migrants, especially in relation to mothering practices. To be reflexive a reader would need to recognise the basis on which the preferred reading differs from their alternative reading. Mostly the preferred reading is derived from the psychological and experiential match between the reader and the text. However, alternative readings are produced when readers convert this

knowledge to the social and cultural levels, paving the way for a more overt challenge of textual ideologies made possible through a critical literacy approach. A defence of the alternative reading could include such observations as the following.

While reading I recognised that I was not fulfilling the role of the ideal or the 'implied reader' (Iser, 1974) for this text because I could not accept this as a complete happy families story. I could not accept the social and cultural implications and enjoy it as I felt I was supposed to.

Both of the subjective readings presented in this article have been produced through active engagement or transaction (Rosenblatt, 1978) with the text using subjective reading practices such as 'mirroring' and 'filling in the gaps'. Mirroring is the process of producing an identity by identifying (or not) with someone else's (a character's) position (Moon, 1992: p. 96). The key question that readers ask in this instance is, How does this text relate to my personal, social, cultural and psychological experience?

Filling gaps is the process of producing a reading by making connections drawn from a 'commonsense' understanding of the world (Moon, 1992: p. 54) and knowledge generated from a range of textual sites. In other words, readers use not only their personal experience to make sense of the text, but also their textual repertoire. In this approach readers also fill gaps by (mis)matching ideologies in the text with their beliefs. A match produces an ideal or preferred reading while a mis-match produces an alternative reading. This manner of reading is concerned with the building of personal identity through the reading of a variety of literary texts offering different ideological perspectives. The reading strategies included in this approach do not encourage the reader to look beyond agreement or mild disagreement with the perceived textual ideologies.

This reading approach encourages readers to have a personal input into the meaning-making process in that it does not lock them into one preferred reading supported by notions of authorial intention or textual coherence. However, the role of the reader is limited to a personal transaction with the text. Although there is an admission of the reader's personal ideologies in transaction with the text, this approach does not enable the reader to challenge ideological views about which the text is entirely silent. To do so would move the reading from alternative to resistant or oppositional: to read against the text.

A world context/critical literacy approach: Reading 4

Although a world-context approach also involves the reader's interaction with the text in order to make meaning, the interaction is not personal or centred on a subjective response as it is in a

reader-centred approach. This fourth approach is generated from the general principles of poststructuralism, including aspects of Marxist and feminist theories. Again, the reader no longer looks for a fixed theme locked inside the text as an end in itself, but needs to recognise the way the text privileges certain voices before reading against it. In a world-context approach the reader isolates themes and ideas in the text through his or her participation daily in a variety of discursive practices generated from ideological beliefs.

The concept of Discourse is an important facet of this reading practice because it expands on the understanding that multiple readings are produced when the personal is taken up as social and critical knowledge. Discourse (with a capital 'D') is defined by Gee (1996: p. 131) as:

...a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'.

Through an understanding of and membership in specific Discourses (feminism, sexism, Christianity, racism, ageism), readers are able to take up or reject reading positions offered by the text.

Kress (1986: p. 209) uses

...the term *reading position* to indicate that any text constructs a position for its ideal reader, a kind of vantage point, a preferred point of view from which to read a text, and in doing this indeed constructs an ideal reader. That is, texts make certain (unstated) assumptions about what their ideal readers should be, should think, should know, and should expect. The text, especially a successful text, coerces readers into that position, so that they read the text without resistance, 'naturally'. Of course, few readers are ideal readers, and indeed it ought to be the task of any reading programme to produce readers who are not ideal readers for any text; that is, readers who counter the text's attempts at coercion, to produce 'resistant readers' [emphasis in original].

Essential to the notion of reading position is the belief that no text is innocent, transparent or politically neutral (Kress, 1985). The state of textual non-neutrality has nothing to do with authorial intention. One aim of using this approach is to determine how texts position readers to become ideal readers. Another important consideration for readers using this approach is that not all texts we encounter are striving to position readers within conservative ideologies. For example, the so-called feminist fairytales are themselves purporting to offer resistant readings of dominant Discourses of masculinity and femininity offered in traditional fairytales (see Cole, 1986).

When reading in this fourth approach, multiple readings that profile a variety of themes are defensible because texts are read through the taking up of different subject positions. Cranny-Francis (1990: p. 25) usefully establishes links between reading position, subject position and discourse when she proposes that:

Subject position is the discursive equivalent of reading position; it describes the position of the individual subject in relation to a particular discourse or set of discourses, rather than a particular text.

When reading texts in this way, readers consider characters not as real people as they are in the other three approaches. Rather, characters are representations of particular social, historical, ideological or cultural positions or Discourses as outlined by Kress (1985) and Gee (1996). This approach to reading has a combined sociological and linguistic focus, that is, readers are understood to make meaning of all kinds of texts according to their social experiences, values and social, ideological or cultural views of the world. As is always the case with all approaches to textual analysis, readers using this approach must also make meaning through a close reading of the language of the text. In *Mum Goes To Work* readers are positioned by the visual as well as the written language. A close reading of literary language and textual organisation is used to support propositions or hunches about the kinds of reading positions that the text offers the ideal reader.

The relationship between reading positions and language can be explained further in terms of lower-case 'd' discourse, described by Gee (1990: p. 142) as 'connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories...'. Gee makes the connection between discourse or the word and Discourse and ways of being in the world. Through their inter-relationship, Discourse and discourse work together to explicate a world-context approach to reading by showing that language is a way of representing and constructing the social world.

A world-context approach shares an ideological concern with a reader approach but now develops it by interrogating representations of power and inequality through a focus on what the text is not saying. Therefore, using the strategies outlined in the introduction to this article, readers are helped to understand and to resist particular ideological sways promoted by texts: to produce readings 'which are [sometimes] unacceptable in terms of the dominant cultural beliefs, and which challenge prevailing views' (Moon, 1992: p. 104). Often, but not always, this means taking up reading positions that generate support for marginalised Discourses.

In order to produce a resistant reading of *Mum Goes To Work* the reader taking this approach needs to know how the text is

positioning her to accept the preferred reading: *it is a woman's responsibility to love and care for children even if she works outside the home*. The text can be read also as promoting the well being of the single mother and her family, a preferred reading that fits some versions of feminism. However, the application of world-context reading strategies highlights several silences in both reading positions. Silences result from the fact that textual gaps enable readers to avoid questioning certain values (Moon, 1992: p. 54; Moon, 1992: p. 37- 40). The detection of textual silences can sustain resistant readings. In *Mum Goes To Work* (1992) the preferred reading supports hegemonic Discourses of femininity and patriarchy and is therefore silent about other ways of organising the social world. The following is a possible reading that strives to resist these Discourses.

In Mum Goes To Work generic Mum has no name and is only identifiable as a child's mother. The repetitive patterning of the written and visual text, in eight discrete sequences, reinforces the notion that all mothers are essentially the same. Although Mum is culturally diverse and works inside and outside the home, she is not represented consistently in situations where she is in control of her working life. Mum the potter, where there is a trace of an oppositional Discourse, is the only exception. As a potter she might have more control over her workplace conditions. The lexical analysis used in a text-based approach/reading 2 supports this ideological assumption. In the Rosie and Jack, the Max and the Khen stories Mum is reactive to the needs of others. Hegemonic Discourses of patriarchy are particularly reinforced in the visuals and the written text of two mothers' side of the story. Laurence's mother 'sews the clothes [in the factory]...And sometimes she helps cut the material'. The visual text shows her hunched nervously over a paper pattern, about to cut the material. She is pictured being supervised by a taller, older man. Similarly Briget's mother who works in a supermarket unpacking boxes 'sometimes' takes the customers' money. Even if these stories are read as told from the child's point of view, these mothers are hardly in charge of their lives.

The readings produced so far in the fourth approach have been generated from a feminist Discourse of gender and power. A different resistant reading of the same text is available to readers reading through Discourses of race and femininity.

Although the book won the Australian Multicultural Children's Book Award it excels in promoting monoculturalism — all the mothers represented are the same. They dress and behave similarly towards their children. There is no celebration of racial difference, just assimilation into lower-paid, male-dominated jobs and middle-class, white, Australian cultural norms of practising motherhood. Overall, the sequences collectively position the reader to accept the hegemonic patriarchal Discourses of femininity and the dominant Discourse of monoculturalism

while pretending to promote feminist independence and multicultural sympathies. Mum Goes To Work mimics the traditional fairytale that plays false homage to feminism and multicultural diversity and harmony.

There is an important difference between a world-context approach to reading, often referred to as critical literacy, and the three other approaches discussed in this article. With its emphasis on reader positioning and interrogation of the text's underlying ideological assumptions, this fourth approach facilitates readers' explicit awareness of the ways in which readings are produced. This awareness extends beyond the notion of reflexivity discussed in a reader-centred approach. A world-context approach encourages readers to question the methods of production of readings in the other three approaches. Critical literacy is not only an alternative means of interpreting all kinds of texts but also a means of investigating how different readings are produced. For example, readers might question the notion of universal themes or moral lessons produced from an author-centred reading and a text-centred reading by asking whose interests the themes/lessons serve.

Concluding comments

This article has demonstrated the production of multiple readings of the one text using reading practices derived from traditional and contemporary literary theories. The methods of producing different readings have been discussed by reference to specific reading practices. Beginning with an author-based approach, the interpretative process was based on an understanding of how authors use language to communicate their views of the world. Moving next to a text-based approach, it was shown how readers using this approach must develop skills related to a knowledge of literary devices and textual organisation so as to glean meaning solely from the words on the page. In approaches one and two, the reader's views, experiences and ideological sways are of no concern in the making of meaning. The finding of universal themes and moral directions locked inside texts is intrinsic to these traditional approaches to textual analysis. In contrast, the reader's personal and literary experience has been shown to be paramount in the establishment of meaning in a reader-centred approach. Using this approach, readers can choose to match ideologies with that of the text: read with the preferred reading. They might also begin to challenge the ideologies they locate in their reading of the text and therefore produce an alternative reading. Alternative readings rely on the individual reader's personal knowledge being taken up as social and cultural knowledge and can be developed further using reading practices generated from critical literacy or world context approach.

The article has discussed in depth the fourth approach: a world-context approach since it challenges the validity of teachers using the other three exclusively. In this approach the reader's focus on personal experience is replaced by the reader's knowledge of Discourses and the ways in which these can be represented sociolinguistically as texts. The resistant readings offered in the article are based on the reader's opposition to the text's ideological assumptions about gender, race and power. Other readers might choose to interrogate the social, ideological and political nature of the same text differently.

Used singly or in combination, the four approaches to reading outlined here offer readers an expanded notion of the nature of literature. The emphasis on the fourth, critical literacy approach invites teacher educators and teachers to expand the kinds of literacy pedagogies and constructions of subject English available in classrooms.

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