



Cape Peninsula
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**THE CRITICAL READER-RESPONSES OF GRADE 4 CHILDREN TO
A NOVEL WRITTEN BY JUDY BLUME.**

by

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the degree of Masters in Education**

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DECLARATION

I, Monique Smith, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed: 

Monique Smith

Date: 10.09.10

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to a novel written by Judy Blume (1980). The theoretical framework is based on the socio-cultural theories of learning, as well as Rosenblatt's critical reader-response theory (1986).

I examine the following issues: Cambourne's (2004) principles of engagement, Feuersteins' Mediated Learning Experience (1991), Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority (in Boeree, 2006), as well as Scaffolding (Vygotsky in Olivier 2010, 22-23). The literature review includes the most recent published literature pertaining to my research. Video interviews, as well as reflective journalling were used to gather data.

My research answers the following research question: What are the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to *Superfudge*, by Judy Blume? My argument, based on Rosenblatt's critical reader-response theory (1986) accurately reflected the manner in which the Grade 4 children made meaning of prescribed texts. My data was analysed qualitatively, using an inductive approach. In my findings five themes emerged: finding an authentic voice, gaining identity, the entertainment value of the novel, family dynamics with specific reference to siblings and the relocation of families.

The discussion examines insights which emerged from my research. These insights are reviewed in relation to my theoretical frames and relevant literature. In conclusion the process of critical reader-response theory empowers children to develop critical thinking skills and habits that underlie effective reading.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ed.	Edition
eds.	Editors
et al.	And others
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
MLE	Mediated Learning Experience
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
USA	United States of America
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (2002:3) states that the curriculum seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, multi-skilled and compassionate in a society as a critical and active citizen. Teachers are encouraged to inspire children with values based on respect, democracy, equality, human dignity and social justice. This study is based on a prescribed novel, carefully selected for Grade 4 children with the aim of addressing four of the six learning outcomes (listening, speaking, writing and thinking and reasoning), as well as investigating the critical reader-responses of the children. *Superfudge* (1980) , by Judy Blume, was selected because it would delight and encourage introspection in my Grade 4 children.

Novels prescribed for primary school children are selected by teachers, who are well-versed in the learning outcomes of the curriculum. However, as adults they experience the content of these novels in a distinctly different manner to the children for whom novels are prescribed. The novels are selected to deliberately expose children to a variety of values, identities and knowledges. Braxton (2007:52) states that prime considerations for selecting an appropriate story are age: gender, current interests and the size of the audience.

This study was conducted in 2008 in an independent school in the Western Cape, where the children came from predominantly wealthy homes. It investigated the manner in which Grade 4 children respond to texts which we, as teachers, have selected for them. Although the participants all owned a copy of the chosen novel, most of it was read aloud to them. This was done by myself in my dual role of teacher and researcher. As a reader, I enjoyed this novel. The reading experience was

gratifying and pleasurable. As a researcher, I was seeking to discover the way that the children in the sample interpreted and made meaning of the novel. During the research the children were also asked whether they appreciated the process of *reading and what their reading preferences were in terms of reading individually or being read to*. They were offered the opportunity to express themselves honestly and without academic pressure.

This chapter discusses the origin and background of the study, the importance thereof, the context of the school and the children in the cohort, my approach as researcher, as well as the purpose and goals of the research. The research question is introduced, terms are clarified, the significance of the study is presented and finally the limitations and assumptions of the proposed study are discussed.

1.2 Origin and background of the study

As mentioned above, novels are selected and prescribed for children by teachers who place an emphasis on the educational value of these novels and approach *teaching them through an academic lens*. The focus is usually on the way in which children articulate when reading aloud and the manner in which they display comprehension through means of various questions. This is limiting and does not allow children to respond freely to texts, because there is a specific way in which they are expected to respond. If comprehension skills are tested properly, it should reveal the way that children individually make meaning of texts.

The ability of children to make meaning of the text is seldom investigated and the various ways in which they do is irrelevant in the school system. Lobron and Selman (2007:529) state that while the idea of promoting social awareness through storytelling and children's literature is not new, there has been little systematic research to discover what meaning children take away from stories with complex, subtle, and even controversial themes. Due to the emphasis having been on the limited academic priorities of teaching literature, teachers place little importance on

making meaning on an affective level. Hence the need for this research in my Grade 4 class.

Many teachers are satisfied when children are able to complete a comprehension assessment successfully and children are praised for reading aloud with fluency. As Lobron and Selman (2007:529) suggested, the meaning which children take away from these novels, as well as the manner in which they relate to their context, are not explored. Although it is stated in Learning Outcome 1 in the NCS (2002:72) that: "the learner will be able to listen for information and enjoyment, and respond appropriately and critically in a wide range of situations", this is only assessed for academic purposes. Little investigation has been done to assess the true critical reader responses of these children beyond what is assessed as academic priorities. According to the NCS (2002:64), we know that a child has listened for information and enjoyment when they, "enjoy listening to different kinds of oral texts and respond appropriately". In my four years of teaching experience in a Grade 4 classroom, I have found the concept of 'enjoyment' difficult to evaluate, since the academic pressure placed on children in the context does not lend itself to authentic responses. Hence the purpose of this study was to discover and understand how children responded to texts being read to them in an informal reading environment.

The NCS (2002:72) aims to develop the skill of reading for understanding. This is a positive objective, yet it does not develop a child's ability to make meaning from a text. There is significant value in teaching children to understand the words which they are reading, but children are not always encouraged to analyse the text in an affective manner, understanding the social context thereof and identifying with it. The goal is to give children the opportunity to position themselves in relation to viewpoints and cultures within texts, and to make connections between language and other symbolic ways of making meaning, connections between language and other disciplines, as well as connections between language and culture. These connections are essential if we are to prepare children for the broadest range of language use and allow them to achieve their full communicative potential (Kern,

2008:367).

The NCS (2002:72) states that children in schools should develop the ability to read aloud and silently and to be fully literate. During the research process the children did *not need to read aloud as more emphasis was placed on the social awareness which was created during the process of studying this novel*. This research served as a platform for children to make meaning from the text in a non-threatening context and to create their own social awareness through means of the literature.

Teachers should play a significant role in cultivating a love for reading in their children. They need to introduce children to many texts and allow them many *opportunities to read silently, as well as aloud. Each child interprets and experiences literature individually and their critical responses are based on their own life experiences*. A good teacher is able to recognise the differences in backgrounds amongst their children, and embraces the varying opinions that emerge. When this occurs, children are treated individually and their love for reading grows on a deeper and more mature level.

Although this study was undertaken for research purposes, the manner in which this novel was read together with questions, aimed to develop the children's ability to make meaning. This research approach can be applied to any classroom in order to create a social awareness and train children to read beyond the face value of literature.

1.3 The importance of the problem

Prescribed novels are an essential part of our school curriculum. The NCS (2002:72) suggests that children will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts. The NCS continues, explaining that reading for information and enjoyment has been successful when a child identifies and discusses values in texts in relation to cultural,

social, environmental and moral issues. A significant amount of language instruction is centred on prescribed novels and assessment tasks are often based on them.

Prescribed novels are selected in order to enhance children's ability to read silently and aloud, to cultivate a love for reading in children and to stimulate their imagination. Children may be able to read with fluency and basic comprehension skills, but they often lack the ability to respond critically to the texts that are offered to them. Due to the wealthy context of the children in the sample, they lacked a social awareness of those who live in less wealthy circumstances, or who experience different ways of life.

Reading prescribed novels often becomes a part of a daily routine at school, yet an in-depth analysis at Grade 4 level is not practised. Children are not encouraged to read critically, neither applying the text to their own lives nor analysing it in more depth than having to answer comprehension questions. The readers may be able to understand the text without difficulty, but they need to be able to respond to it on a personal and critical level.

Although novels are selected for beneficial purposes, children often read with the assessment which follows in mind, rather than making their own meaning of the novel and applying it to their own lives. Reading in the classroom should stimulate the children's desire to read and motivate them to read more. Although classroom reading activities happen in certain communities, there are many children who struggle to read and do not have an interest in reading. This lack of interest is evident in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) Diagnostic Assessment results which indicate an improvement in Grade 3 literacy from 2002 where the pass rate was 35.7%, to 2008 where it was 53.5% (Grant, 2009).

The aim of prescribing novels to primary school children is for them to spend time reading, both silently as well as aloud in front of their classmates. Another important aim ought to be that children engage in reading and writing to address their personal needs, with a view to motivating them to learn. Current research indicates that South

African classrooms have the opposite effect, since there is a negative attitude towards reading and many children are reluctant to read in front of their peers. There is little connection between the act of reading and the context of the reader. Children read because they have to. They are not encouraged to find the link between their lives and the lives of the characters in the novels. When children see themselves in books, they regard reading as an activity for themselves, and not for others (Abadiano, 2010:3). They engage with the text on an individual, personal manner.

Children are often told to read, merely as a homework task, with no other sense of commitment or curiosity. Due to the academic demands of school, the reading homework task is often left till the last minute and is completed when the children are tired, or in the car, on the way to school, when there are many distractions. Reading has become an activity that children feel they have to do on a daily basis, because teachers set it as a homework instruction. Some children struggle with reading aloud and this has led to a lack of interest in literature. Children are assessed on their ability to read with fluency and accuracy. If they struggle, they begin to avoid it altogether (Rasinski, 2006:18). Others may struggle with comprehension tasks, creating a reluctance to engage in literature for fear of the inability to interpret it in the same manner as their peers. This is why children's ability to interpret texts is important, reminding them that their interpretations are neither right nor wrong. They need to be reassured that their opinions, as well as the way in which they are able to relate to the text, are more crucial than receiving excellent academic results for *comprehension tests or reading.*

Making meaning of text extends beyond responding to comprehension questions. In this research project, it was therefore critical, that the children and I discussed books and reading, as well as the ways in which they reflected on their lives. I presented reading as more than a set of skills to be mastered. Graff (2009:357) states that by viewing reading as complex practices and processes involving genuine and critical inquiries of self and society, teachers can assist even struggling readers to become lifelong readers.

1.4 Context of the study

The school that was used for this study is located in an affluent area on the Atlantic seaboard of Cape Town. All the children in the study were first language English speakers. There were nineteen Grade Four children in my class, of which five had joined the school at the beginning and during the course of the year. Seven of the participants had been at the school since pre-school. Fifteen of the participants came from homes where they had at least one sibling and eleven of the children came from homes where they lived with two parents. Five of the children were collected from school by an au-pair who helped them complete their homework and entertained them until their parents returned from work. All the participants came from homes where there was a domestic worker present on most days, cleaning their homes and often cooking the food for the family.

It is vital to bear the above observations in mind when investigating what meaning these children made of text. I posed questions that I knew were appropriate to their context and level. The children came from homes where both parents were educated and where consequently reading was an activity that was encouraged and nurtured. However, due to the demanding jobs of the parents, few of the children were being read to at home. The novel was studied during the last few weeks of term when the children were tired and ready for a holiday. This was part of the reason I decided to read to them, making it a fun activity to look forward to at the end of each school day. Many participants mentioned that they especially enjoyed that aspect of the research.

This was my second year of teaching at this particular school and I remained surprised at the moneyed homes that the children in my class represented. One of the most important reasons I chose to read *'Superfudge'* (Blume, 1980) and research the children's responses, was the similarities between the main character and the children in the class. Although the family in the novel was a middle-class family who was not wealthy, the protagonist, Peter's troubles with his brother, as well as many other events in the novel, could, in my opinion, allow the children to relate to him.

During the novel Peter's family, who had been contented in their surroundings, were moved to another city. The children in the school where I teach do not always realise that not everybody had the home conveniences which they take for granted. We teach them that their luxuries are a privilege and not a right. Due to the high divorce rate among the parents of children at the school, I selected a novel suitable for my research that included this theme. The novel also reminds the readers of the importance of relationships rather than material possessions. This was a deliberate notion which I wanted to reinforce, due to my knowledge of the social circumstances of the participants in the study.

As their class teacher, I knew the children well prior to conducting my research. I already knew which children would co-operate according to my instructions when reading the novel to them in class and which children would struggle to sit quietly during these sessions. There was one participant who battled to focus, so the discussions held between chapters proved to serve as a welcome break from simply sitting and listening to the novel being read.

The participants were all able to read fairly well, yet they repeatedly expressed an appreciation for being read to. The novel was read to the children at the end of each school day during the November examinations. There was no academic assessment at that time and the children were able to relax and recline if they chose to, while I read to them. The school sets rigorous academic standards, which often leads to a serious approach to education. The humorous element in the novel ensured that the children remained interested and that they were able to take joy from the experience of the novel. It was good for them to move away from academic pressure and to relax and enjoy a good story.

On completion of the reading of the novel the research questions were posed and the children were afforded an opportunity to respond verbally, which was filmed, as well as by writing in their reflective journals. They were co-operative and followed instructions with no hesitation. This made the data collection process significantly

more simple for me. The mutual level of respect enabled me to collect rich data from the research process.

1.5 Approach to the study

My approach to the study included approximately three weeks of reading the selected novel aloud to the children in my class. As a teacher I had a certain style of reading and I made sure that I read in an animated fashion. I tried to keep the children interested in the novel by using many different voices and to read with emotion. Many children commented in their responses that they particularly enjoyed this aspect of the experience. After every chapter we would have a short discussion about the events in the story, allowing the children to ask questions and to clarify the meanings of words that they may not have understood.

The children were interviewed in order to receive feedback from them regarding the novel. The children were constantly reminded that they were under no obligation to participate, but that their input was valuable and their opinions were important. They were invited to volunteer to be interviewed and agreed to be videoed. After the video interviews were completed, the children were given additional questions that they could answer in their own time in written form. As a result of the thorough interviewing process, I was provided with rich data and this was then analysed according to the research question.

The reflective journaling was done in a different manner, after the video interviews. The children were all given a booklet. I emphasised that they were under no obligation to write their names on these booklets, nor did they have to answer all the questions. I reminded them that all I wanted from them was an honest answer to each question. I wrote a question on the board and I asked the participants to answer it quietly in their booklets. As a guideline I would tell them to write no fewer than a certain number of words, but that they could write as much as they wanted to beyond that. They were explicitly reminded that spelling and grammar were not going to be

assessed and that all I was interested in was their honest opinions. These journals, as well as the video interviews served as a tool to investigate the manner in which children made meaning of the prescribed novel. The children were repeatedly reminded that the research process would not include any form of formal assessment. The children were informed about the research, as well as the reason why I was conducting it. They were consistently encouraged to be honest in their responses and that they would not offend anyone nor get into trouble if their responses were negative.

During the research process it was important that the children remained engaged in the novel in order to generate valid data and participate in a critical discourse during the journalling and interviewing processes.

1.6 Purpose and goal of the study

Reading forms an important part of the curriculum as stated explicitly in the NCS (2002). Novels are read frequently in the classroom. There are four books prescribed in Grade 4 at the school where this research was conducted. The teacher generally allows the children the opportunity to read aloud and this is often done for assessment purposes.

Although reading activities are to be encouraged, little investigation has been made to assess the manner in which children respond critically to literature. This study served to extract the way in which children responded to a text when there was no academic pressure and they were encouraged to reflect on the text on a personal and somewhat intimate level.

During the course of this study, the children were allowed to express their interpretation of the text in a guided, yet uninhibited way. The aim of this study was to evaluate the amount of feedback I could receive from children, as well as the depth thereof, when they were encouraged to respond critically and honestly to a story that

had been read to them. Because I read the novel to the children, challenging words or their inability to read fluently did not distract them.

1.7 Research question

The key question in this study is as follows:

What are the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to 'Superfudge', a novel written by Judy Blume?

The answer to this question will be shown by progressively answering the following sub-question:

What are the common themes within reader-responses to the prescribed novel?

1.8 Clarification of terms

1.8.1 Critical reader-response

Rosenblatt (2004:1376) was one of the first people who advanced the reader-response theory. Her work is primarily focused on describing readers' processes of engagement and involvement for composing and interpreting their own meaning of texts. Critical reader-response refers to the reader's ability to respond to a text in an individual, personal manner. It refers to teaching skills of close, concise, attentive analysis while encouraging children to express their responses honestly, freely and confidently. It means that teaching literature does not involve viewing the text as authority but focuses on the reader's relationship with the text.

1.8.2 Reflective journalling

Many teachers subscribe to the use of reflective journalling in the classroom as both a way of getting students to engage in content matter as well as a way to help them find some level of personal connection to content material (Mills, 2008:684). In this

study, reflective journalling was used to record the responses to certain guided questions. There was no academic assessment and the journal was treated as confidential. The journals were kept by the readers.. They were given basic guidelines as to the minimum length of their responses but were encouraged to write as much as they were able to.

1.8.3 Affluent environment

In this research project the site where the data was gathered was at an independent school on the Atlantic seaboard in Cape Town. This school has one of the most expensive school-fee structures in the Western Cape.

1.8.4 Critical

According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Sykes, 1982:225) the term 'critical' means '*skilful at, or engaged in criticism; providing textual criticism.*' The children in this study were expected to develop the skills necessary for reading with depth and insight.

1.9 Significance of the proposed study

The NCS (2002:72) emphasises the need for academic achievement, accuracy and fluency when reading. Little emphasis is placed on the manner in which children relate to text and make meaning thereof.

The school, where the data was collected, places a high priority on reading. The children in Grade 4 are required to read two age-appropriate novels per term and they needed to complete a book report on these novels. These novels are in addition to their prescribed novel. The book reports are guided by a form which the children complete. The questions on the form included aspects which they enjoyed, where the book was published, the name of the author, the plot and their favourite characters.

There is value in such a book report as it familiarises children with various novels, as well as details such as authors and publishers, but there is no indication of how much meaning the child has made from the novel. Many children simply rush through two novels at the end of the term in order to write a quick book report because it is required. There is no evidence that the novel which the child has completed has made an impact on them, nor that they appreciated the true intention of the author.

I chose to conduct this research due to my concern for Grade 4 children developing a negative attitude towards literature and ultimately losing interest in reading altogether. Despite coming from homes where reading was prioritised, I was made aware that books were not discussed in these homes. It was my intention to discover the critical reader-responses of these children, in order to identify the manner in which they are able to make meaning from texts. I often underestimated the way in which they were able to internalise literature and responded to it. This study allowed me to ascertain the level on which these children were able to make meaning of the text.

As the data collection period progressed, I was able to gauge the depth of the responses that the participants could give me and I began to include slightly more challenging questions. I believe that to cultivate an interest in reading and to maintain the reading culture which we desire for our school, the children needed to be encouraged to respond critically. Although formal assessment is vital, children need to have a platform to express themselves without any fear or inhibitions.

1.10 Limitations of the study

This study is limited to one Grade 4 class from a school on the Atlantic seaboard in Cape Town. The study was conducted in the same classroom by myself, as their class teacher. There was another Grade 4 class reading the same novel, but the children in that class were not included in my study. The study involved only nineteen children whom I had taught since the start of the academic year in 2008.

The data collection process was limited to the end of the academic year since it was my final opportunity to teach that particular group. They were all presented with the same questions and were all encouraged to respond verbally during video interviews, as well as in writing in their reflective journals.

The study was limited to the critical reader-responses to one Judy Blume novel, *Superfudge* (1980).

1.11 Assumptions of the study

The assumption, that the children came from literate social circumstances where reading was an everyday activity, was made during this study.

It was also assumed that the children were all interested in listening to the novel being read, at the end of each day, during the examination period.

The study assumed that the children would look after their reflective journals and submit them at the end of the academic year.

The assumption was also made that the children participated willingly in the data collection process and that they would verbalise their lack of interest if it were to emerge.

1.12 Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis. The research problem is presented, as well as the origin and background, importance, context, approach and purpose of the study. The research question is stated and key terms are clarified in this chapter. The significance of the study, limitations and assumptions are specified.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the appropriate critical and theoretical literature available to me. This includes all the literature used during the process of writing this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents a thorough explanation of the research approach which was used during this study. It describes the manner in which I conducted the video interviews, as well as the reflective journaling process. It gives details about the nineteen Grade 4 children who participated in this study.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed account of the results and serves as a discussion of the findings from the research questions.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results and conclusions of the research. Recommendations are given and limitations are explored.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is twofold: to both examine the literature of theorists who have explored how children process information and texts and to interrogate recently published literature based on critical reader-responses that emerged from my research project.

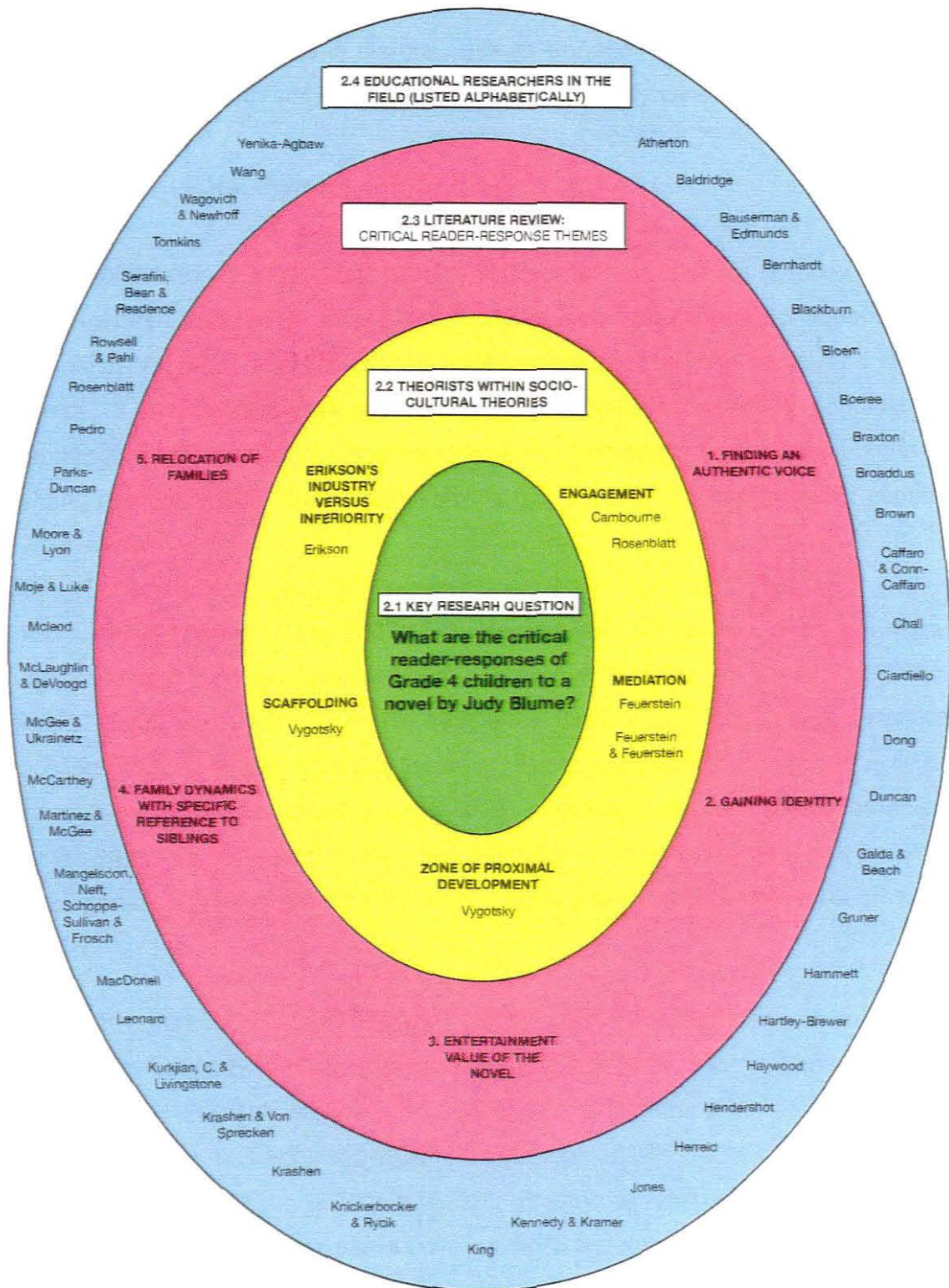
The model presented in Figure 2.1 on page 18 adapted from Condy (2006:32) serves as a summary of the theoretical frameworks used to define the theorists and the processes which I explored, as well as the relevant literature that pertains to my research.

In seeking an understanding of the manner in which my Grade 4 students made meaning of literature, I sought a strong theoretical base. The research question warranted a theory that attended to social, cultural and contextual factors. Although the focus was not on the actual social interactions during the reading process, the social aspect of the reading process was crucial to the development of their meaning making and learning. Since the research site was in an affluent environment, the critical reader-responses had particular cultural features and this required a strong theoretical understanding. The social constructivism theory, based on the work of Cambourne (2004:28), describes the principles of engagement explaining the contextual factors as contributors to the research question. Cambourne's theory is discussed in detail on page 20.

Therefore, the theoretical framework that underpins this current research is based on socio-cultural theories of learning. Within this theory, five dimensions have emerged from this research and they are: Cambourne's principles of engagement (2004),

Feuersteins' Mediated Learning Experience (MLE), Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Vygotsky's scaffolding and, finally, Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority. In the literature review, the predominant theory is that of Rosenblatt's critical reader-response. I begin by offering an overview of this critical reader-response theory and proceed to debate the five themes that became apparent during the readings: finding an authentic voice, gaining identity, the entertainment value of the novel, family dynamics with specific reference to siblings and relocation of families.

Figure 2.1: An overview of the Conceptual Framework Model



This section presents the socio-cultural theories of learning applicable to my research. Among others, it explores the work of Rosenblatt, Cambourne, Erikson, Piaget, as well as Vygotsky in themes such as engagement, mediation, the Zone of Proximal Development, scaffolding and Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority.

2.2 Socio-cultural theories of learning

Wang (2007:149) described the notion of socio-cultural learning theories as being learner-centred, providing insight into collaborative approaches to learning. The theories of Vygotsky and Feuerstein, for example, mention the social and cultural aspects of acquiring knowledge. Socio-cultural theories carefully consider the importance that the roles of social relationships, community and culture play in the learning process, rather than simply viewing the learning process as being confined to an individual.

Socio-cultural theories (Wang 2007:152) viewed within our real world are not difficult to understand within the context of learning being embedded in a social and cultural context. Moore and Lyon (2004:176) suggested that comprehension was a result of processes that were developed in the very young, and weave through all activities before, during and after reading, as children interacted with texts, each other and their teachers. As they mature, they become part of other social networks including school, continuing to shape their thinking, learning and development through social interaction.

Rosenblatt (2004:1383) stated that the reader's 'to-and-fro' process of building an interpretation becomes a form of transaction with an author persona sensed through and behind the text. The implied relationship was even termed "a contract" with the author. The closer their linguistic-experiential equipment, the more likely the reader's interpretation will fulfill the writer's intention. Sharing at least versions of the same language was so basic that often it was simply assumed. Other factors affecting communication were contemporary membership in the same social and cultural

group, the same educational level, and membership in the same discourse community, such as academic, legal, athletic, literary, scientific, or theological. Given such similarities, the reader was more likely to bring to the text the prior knowledge, acquaintance with linguistic and literary conventions and assumptions about social situations required for understanding implications or allusions and noting nuances of tone and thought. Galda and Beach (2001:66) argued that responses were not simply a transaction between texts and readers, but a construction of text meaning and reader stances and identities within larger socio-cultural contexts. Readers, texts and contexts were studied as constituted by culture and history. According to socio-cultural learning theories, a collaborative learning activity was critical in any teaching context. A well-designed learning activity will engage and motivate children in learning and develop their critical thinking and lifelong learning skills. Socio-cultural learning theories provide us with models for developing collaborative learning activities that enable children to actively engage in the learning process (Wang, 2007:159).

2.2.1 Cambourne's principles of engagement

This section will discuss how two theorists, Rosenblatt and Cambourne, view the processes of literacy engagement with texts as well as reader-responses.

Rosenblatt (2004:1376) was one of the first researchers who advanced the reader-response theory from 1938 onwards. Her work was primarily focused on describing readers' processes of engagement and involvement for composing and interpreting their own meaning of texts.

According to Rosenblatt, reader-response theories rejected the 'New Criticism' of the late 1930s through the 1950s which assumed that the texts themselves were central and that teachers were to teach the skills of close, concise, attentive analysis while discouraging expression of and attention to differences in students' own individual responses. Thus, in the 1960s and early 70s there occurred a paradigm shift in the teaching of literature away from viewing the text as authority to a view that focused

on the reader's relationship with text. According to Rosenblatt (2004:1376), benefits of these approaches included increased motivation to read, higher levels of response and improved reading ability. Rosenblatt would concur with Vygotsky (1978) in that to achieve the end product, a more knowledgeable person would mediate the reader's relationship with the text in order for deeper meaning to be made. Vygotsky theorised that it was only when the reader actively participated in the dialogue with his or her peers and teachers to solve socio-cognitive conflicts, that cognitive development occurred. Therefore, it is crucial for the teacher to establish an open and supportive classroom environment where socio-cognitive conflicts are promoted rather than avoided or suppressed. Galda and Beach (2001:66) agreed with Rosenblatt (1986) and Vygotsky (1978), when they stated that texts, readers and contexts, each inseparable from the other, were also inseparable from the larger social contexts in which they were enacted.

Rosenblatt (2004:1376) continued by stating that theories of reader response explained how readers created meaning. She identified three aspects of this process: the reader, the text and the context. The different relationships that were possible between these components defined different perspectives of reader response.

Rosenblatt (2004:1376) noted that during any one reading experience readers shifted back and forth along a continuum between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' modes of reading processing. She explained that 'efferent responses' highlighted carrying information away in order to learn something. Traditional or textual approaches to literature instruction favoured an efferent stance to literature. Aesthetic responses put the reader in the text world, making the reading a 'lived-through experience.' Thus, in adopting an aesthetic stance, a reader may briefly focus on analysing the techniques interacting in a text, responding emotionally and cognitively to it. Adopting an aesthetic stance allowed the reader to engage with the text in a personal way. In an efferent stance, the reader may be stimulated to remember a related personal experience, but it allowed for a very limited affective, emotional response.

Cambourne (2004:28) found that children remembered personal experiences when they engaged with the reading process. Four factors influenced the degree to which learners engaged with the literacy demonstrations of the teacher. Cambourne (in Farstrup & Samuels 2002) explained Rosenblatt's (1986) thoughts on personal and socially influenced responses when he asked the question whether that which is learned can be separated from the context in which it is learned - what and how we learn need to be viewed in the same light and the purpose or goals that the child brings to the learning situation are central to what they learn. In order to make meaning and gain knowledge, a process of negotiation, evaluation and transformation needs to occur.

Cambourne (2004:28) formulated the following four principles of engagement: children engage when they were capable of doing the learning, when the learning has some potential or value for them, when they were free from anxiety, and when they trust the demonstrator. In my research I found that I agreed with all of Cambourne's principles and I will briefly explain each one.

Firstly, Cambourne (2004:28) stated that deep engagement with demonstrations is maximised when children are convinced that they are potential doers of whatever is being demonstrated. They need to receive the message that they are capable of ultimately learning what is being demonstrated.

In his second principle of engagement, Cambourne (2004:28) stated that engaging with what was being demonstrated in the form of reading the novel, added further educational value to the lives of the children. By asking children questions regarding the novel, there was mediation during the process. This process added value and benefitted children in their future educational careers. Rosenblatt (2004:1373) suggested that when children read from an aesthetic stance, they adopt an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through during the reading event. The aesthetic reader pays attention to the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities and emotions that are called forth. They participate in the tensions, conflicts and resolutions of the images, ideas and scenes as they unfold.

The 'lived-through' meaning is felt to correspond to the text. It is this 'lived-through' meaning that is the object of the reader's interpretation and response both during and after the reading event.

The third principle of engagement for Cambourne (2004:28) was that learners engage in texts when they are free from anxiety. This allows them an opportunity to respond freely, without hesitation.

Finally, the fourth principle of engagement discussed by Cambourne (2004:28) which was important in my study, was that the children trusted me as their class teacher and the person who was demonstrating the critical reflective process.

Cambourne expanded on this thought of engaging with texts when he stated that 'potential learners can be in classrooms where teacher demonstrations are of high quality, but many of them will not learn to read or write effectively. Potential learners must engage with teacher demonstrations if they are to learn from them.' Vygotsky (in Atherton, 2009) suggested that the process of engagement with the adult and the text, enabled children to effectively participate in the learning experience. Research shows that in a community of learners, a child's potential performance level is increased (Wang, 2007:149).

Cambourne's theories were confirmed by both Erikson (in Boeree, 2006:4) and Vygotsky (in Dong, 2008:231) that completing and discussing a novel give the children a sense of industry, a feeling of competence and mastery. To achieve this they would have had to engage with the interactive reading and reflective process, thereby avoiding a sense of failure, inferiority or a poor self-esteem. Wang (2007:149) suggested that collaborative learning, based on socio-cultural learning theories, provided children with more effective learning opportunities. Children learn in a community of learners, and this environment allowed them to act as community members. They engaged in class activities, interacted with others and solved problems or completed tasks. They thought about their thinking, talked about their thinking and explored answers to the problems or tasks. The teacher acted as a

motivator to encourage divergent answers and develop critical thinking. In this learning environment, children's independent and reflective thinking skills were improved.

Since mediation was an important theoretical concept in this research, it will be explored in more detail.

2.2.2 Feuerstein's theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)

In this section, I will be examining the work of Feuerstein's MLE. The discussion concludes by linking mediation with socio-cultural theories of learning.

Haywood (1993:27) described the mediational teaching style as a direct derivative of Feuerstein's Theory of Structural Cognitive Modifiability. He explained that it was an application by teachers in classrooms with adult-child interactions referred to as MLE. Feuerstein (1991) believed that for learning to be effective, mediation needs to occur. He and Vygotsky both shared the view that adults play a central and critical role through means of mediation. Feuerstein (1991) maintained that adequate cognitive development is only possible with MLE provided by adults.

Feuerstein (1991:3) commented on the MLE concept, broadly defining it as the interaction between the human being and its social environment via a human mediator. He examined the role of cultural transmission and MLE in becoming modified by exposure to stimuli in the direction of higher and more efficient levels of functioning and learning (1991:5). Herreid (2009:63) suggested that discussions are a participatory form of teaching; new ideas may emerge that no-one, not even the teacher has thought of before.

Feuerstein (1991:15) described the quality of MLE by a series of twelve parameters of which I will highlight the three that pertained to this research. These three parameters, intentionality and reciprocity, transcendence and the mediation of learning were necessary conditions for an interaction to qualify as a mediated learning experience.

In MLE, the first parameter that pertains to this research (intentionality and reciprocity) is intended to be between the mediatee and the stimuli, activity, or relationship, as well as for the mediator to share this intention with the mediatee. The intention to mediate an event as a personal emotional experience requires the environment to be conducive to mediation, presenting it in a way that allows a high level of cognitive, self-reflective, insightful processing. Reciprocity is a way to turn an implicit intention into an explicit and conscious act. Any content can exhibit the special quality of MLE if determined by the intention. The intention transforms the three partners involved in the interaction – the reading, the teacher and the child. The particular event is transformed in some of its characteristics by the mediator's intention to make it experienced (not just incidentally registered) by the mediatee. *The best way to evaluate the mediational quality of an interaction is to discover the manner in which the intended mediation during the stimulus or event has produced transformation. This transformation of the stimuli to be mediated is accompanied by efforts on the part of the mediator to transform the mental, emotional and motivational state of the mediatee. In order to make it possible for the mediatee to experience the stimuli, it may require an alteration of his state of mind to increase his level of attention and to create conditions of 'consciousness' and 'awareness' which will affect his mental processes (Feuerstein, 1991:15).*

The reciprocity of the relationship between mediator and mediatee is manifested by the mutual questioning and answering which shape the interactions (Feuerstein, 1991:17-19). This dynamic of intentionality and reciprocity leads to socio-cultural learning which is learner-centred. While Feuerstein focused on the relationship between the mediator and mediatee, Wang (2007:150) described socio-cultural theories as taking much greater account of the important roles that social relations, community and culture play in cognition and learning, rather than viewing individuals.

The second parameter of MLE is transcendence. This is considered one of the greatest characteristics of MLE. It appears in MLE from the most fundamental forms to the most complex and advanced forms of human dialogue. Transcendence refers

to going beyond the goals of the interaction. It is defined as the orientation of the mediator to widen the interaction beyond the immediate primary and elementary goal. This creates a tendency in the mediatee to enlarge his cognitive and affective way of functioning. The goal of the interaction between teacher and student is making an individual acquire a skill or supporting him to become competent in an area of knowledge. The intention to make him feel competent transcends the immediate goal of skill or competence acquisition. It is through transcendence that cultures go beyond the individual, immediate physical needs for survival and comply with the collective goals of existence. It is the flexibility created by MLE and transcendence that make the human individual modifiable and ever-changing (Feuerstein, 1991:19-23).

The third criterion of MLE (Feuerstein, 1991:19-23) is the mediation of meaning. This deals mainly with the energetic dimension of the interaction answering the questions of “why”, “what for”, and other questions related to the reasons for the interaction. MLE, inspired by the intention to transcend, mediates the meaning of the interaction, its significance, its “why” and its “what for” to the mediatee. It makes the implicit reasons for change, as well as the goals of the interaction, explicit. The development of independent responses to stimuli is a vital aspect of the process of individuation. Teachers place minimal emphasis on the meaning of a topic, in order to allow the children space to make their own meaning and to discover the world independently. Herreid (2009:63) stated that within socio-cultural learning, groups tend to solve problems better than even the brightest individuals. This is especially true when groups are diverse and individuals act somewhat independently.

Feuerstein's (1993) later work expands on the concept of the mediation of meaning. MLE plays two major roles in determining the quality of the interaction and its formative power. The first is rendering efficient the mediator's attempts to convey to the mediatee the stimulus event, relationship and the concepts, which are the purposes of the interaction. The other role of the mediation of meaning is the creating of awareness in the mediatee of the ‘need’ to look for the ‘meaning’ in a wider sense

of the term. This process includes the search for causal relationships between events and not just the meaning of the mediator's efforts to convey them. The product of the transcending quality of this mediation is of highest value in the orientation of the mediatee's search for meaning and significance. It has important bearing on the *modifiability of the cognitive structure of the individual and in the continuous widening of his need system.*

The mediation of meaning (Feuerstein, 1993) is strongly determined by one's cultural roots. It is, therefore, only natural that the mediator and the mediatees belong to the same culture. In most cases the emotional engagement towards the values of a particular culture can only be found in individuals who have been raised in that culture and are able to identify with it.

The above mentioned parameters of Feuerstein are task dependent and strongly relate to the culture to which one belongs. While Vygotsky (1978) focused on the connections between people and their socio-cultural context, believing that humans require culture, speech and writing to mediate, Feuerstein (1991:16) suggested that MLE is not dependent on the language in which the interaction takes place and that *verbal interaction may be minimal without necessarily diminishing the meditational value of interaction.*

Within these three parameters of MLE, it has become evident that the concept of socio-cultural theory needs further discussion. Wang (2007:149) posited that when we view *socio-cultural theories within our real world, it is not hard to understand that learning is embedded in a social and cultural context.* These social interactions mediate by helping children to understand that events, objects and persons have meaning beyond themselves and that the universe has a predictable structure. He continued, explaining that understanding this structure helps one to know what to do in a wide variety of future situations. An important goal of MLE is to acquire the fundamental cognitive functions that emphasise the ability to learn effectively across many and varied content fields.

Wang (2007:149) argued that without social and cultural interaction, the meaning of context and content would not exist. At the same time, the means and the transference from the unknown to the known would disappear. Internalisation and learning can only occur within social and cultural interaction.

Feuerstein's (1993) first three parameters, intentionality and reciprocity, transcendence and the mediation of learning are all necessary for a learning experience to qualify as MLE. These factors are considered responsible for the structural modifiability that all human beings have in common and are the main conditions for an MLE interaction. These three parameters are universal and can be found in all races, ethnic groups, cultural entities and socio-economic classes.

2.2.3 Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and his socio-cultural theory of learning strongly underpinned this research project. Through adult mediation and social interactions, the children learnt to respond critically to literary texts.

Vygotsky (in Olivier, 2010:22-23) was one of the first psychologists to encourage 'social educational learning'. This term refers to both children working together to help each other learn, and to an adult assisting the child while learning. Both these processes of learning deliberately support the ZPD.

The concept of the ZPD, as outlined by Vygotsky (in Olivier, 2010:22-23), is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental levels as determined by independent problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". What is in the ZPD today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow – what children can do with assistance today they will be able to do by themselves tomorrow. This refers to the abilities exhibited by children working alone and their problem-solving abilities when assisted by or collaborating with the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Many (2002:379) stated that through such forms of assistance, teachers provide the bridges necessary to support children's performance. This requires ongoing assessment and evaluation of the children's

abilities and understanding so that instructional conversations focus on what the student is able to accomplish with assistance.

In addition to the ZPD, Vygotsky examined the social and cultural differences between individuals to help understand children's development. He felt that the socio-economic status and culture of children had a great impact on their cognitive skills. Galda and Beach (2001:66) agreed with Vygotsky (1978) suggesting that children learn to respond to literature as they acquire various social practices, identities and tools through participation in interactive communities. For Vygotsky (1978), *developing language and the articulation of ideas were central to the development and learning of an individual*. The ZPD suggests that children are 'stretched' in order to prepare them for the next developmental stage, which is unique to the individual.

The suggested notion of the ZPD and socio-cultural interaction supported the critical reader-responses throughout this research project. Initially, I verbally critiqued passages within *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) with the intention of role-modelling the processes of critical reader-response. This experience allowed the children the opportunity to orally share their understandings and nuances of the novel, thus creating an interactive learning community.

2.2.4 Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding

The previous paragraph discussed Vygotsky's ZPD and socio-cultural learning theory, while this paragraph describes Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding as being the intentional, strategic support that teachers provide, allowing children to complete a task they could not accomplish independently.

McGee and Ukrainetz (2009:600) suggested that to scaffold appropriately, a teacher needs to determine what kind and how much help or information they should give children in order for them to respond correctly to the task and to internalise skills needed for independent performance later.

As children's experiences and abilities increase, there is less need for adult support. In the same way, once children can successfully use their own words or creativity on a social level, teacher scaffolding becomes unnecessary (Petty, 2009:84). Petty suggested that helping children develop social skills as they interact with peers and adults can support them currently and in the future, as peer acceptance supports positive social development. Adults can hinder children's social development if they continue to provide scaffolding after the child no longer needs it.

Petty (2009:84) stated that open-ended questions can stimulate children's critical thinking and cognitive competence. This kind of question is more thought-provoking for children than simply finding out, "Who did it?" or "Where did it happen?". If teachers use questions such as, "What would happen if...?" or "Why do you think...?" children are more likely to become invested in finding a solution. Rather than discounting them, the teacher relies on the children to assist in helping solve a problem.

Identifying at least two developmental levels to describe children's learning and abilities, Vygotsky (in Cumming-Potvin, 2007:485), in his seminal work, explicated the metaphor of scaffolding. The first or actual developmental level indicates a child's level of mental functioning on an independent task, while the second level measures a child's accomplishments with the assistance of others.

2.2.5 Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority

As opposed to the previous discussions on the theories of learning, I have chosen to explore Erikson's stage of development 'Industry versus Inferiority' as his theory helped me understand the Grade 4 children in this research project. I will expound on this concept below.

Children enter the school environment with limited knowledge of the world. Erikson (in Boeree, 2006:4), explained in his fourth stage, (Industry vs. Inferiority which occurs between the ages of six and eleven), that this is the period when children want to enter the larger world of knowledge and work. One of the greatest events in

children's lives is their entry into school, where they are exposed to the technology of their society through books, multiplication tables, arts and crafts, maps, microscopes, films, tape recorders, calculators, computers, television and video. The learning process however, does not occur in the classroom only, but in every other context of children's lives – at home, at a friend's house or on the street. Children are constructing knowledge through means of social interactions in these contexts. Erikson (in Boeree, 2006:4), noted that children, during stage four, dedicate themselves to education and to learning the social skills their society requires of them.

He stated that a sense of accomplishment and positive self-esteem result in the children gaining independence. Proficiency in language will assist children to reach independence. Erikson concurred with Vygotsky (1978) when he noted that the ZPD implies that children are able to attain the required learning with adult assistance and that the cycle of learning continually supports children in achieving independence.

Erikson was in agreement with Vygotsky's notion of the importance of mediators, as well as other individuals, as role-players within the context of children. He stated that during the fourth stage, there is a much broader social sphere at work.

Parents and other family members are joined by teachers and peers, as well as other members of the community. They all contribute: parents must encourage, teachers must care and peers must accept. Children must learn that there is not only pleasure in conceiving a plan, but in carrying it out. They must learn the feelings of success, whether it is in school or on the playground, academic or social (Erikson in Boeree, 2006:4).

Galda and Beach (2001:68) agreed with Erikson, suggesting that through participation in discussions, students acquire the language and genres that enhance their level of participation and their use of response strategies valued in different types of discussions – small-group or whole-class, student- or teacher-led discussions.

2.3 Literature review

This part of Chapter 2 introduces the themes that arose from the current research on critical reader-response and the many educational reading practitioners who are listed alphabetically in the fourth circle depicted in Figure 2.1 on page 18. These five themes include: 1. finding an authentic voice, 2. gaining identity, 3. the entertainment value of the novel, 4. family dynamics with specific reference to siblings and 5. relocation of families. Each one will be discussed individually and in more detail.

The purpose of this section is to describe how researchers from the field of reading and writing view and study critical reader-response theories and how this critique lays the framework for other teachers to study prescribed books within their classrooms.

Two debates have guided the analysis of each section. First, in discussing each theme, an attempt has been made to provide an overall summary of the most recent research pertaining to that theme. Secondly, I have endeavoured to link this knowledge to the socio-cultural theory which underpins my whole research.

2.3.1 Critical reader-responses

According to Braxton (2006:53), when children complete a book review, they are *thinking about something enough to express and share an opinion*. This helps children to identify what they do and do not like. It is a way of building reflection into the curriculum – something that is often overlooked – and providing opportunities for children to use higher-order thinking skills. Galda and Beach (2001:71) posited that students need to go beyond inferences about characters' actions to contextualise these acts as social practices within larger cultural worlds. Students conceptualise characters' acts in novels in terms of the purposes, roles, rules, beliefs and history, *operating in the worlds of the novel*.

Braxton (2006:53) further commented that ever since books and education became accessible to everyone, book reviews have been a core component of literacy

education. It is very rare to find an individual who moves through their entire school career without having to read and review a literary text at some time. But the task can be a double-edged sword – some children revel in the opportunity to read and reflect, whereas others are turned away from reading altogether. Some children are able to step outside their lives and see the story objectively, whereas others may never develop that perspective.

Knickerbocker and Rycik's (2006:43) re-examination of adolescent literacy has expanded previous cognitive psychological models of reading to include views of the social and cultural aspects of literacy. The term critical literacy refers to approaches that focus on the social forces that influence the creation and interpretation of texts. When applied to the study of literary texts, a critical approach can help individuals to examine their own values, as well as their role in society. Knickerbocker and Rycik stated that meaning and interpretation focus on having the reader articulate a general sense of the theme or significance of the novel. Questions such as, "What is the novel trying to say?" and "What does it say to me?", describe the process of interpretation. From a response perspective, interpretation often focuses on the manner in which readers relate to the text personally. These responses may be connections to their own personal experiences or to other literature they have read.

From a critical literacy perspective, the interpretation process is expanded to include social and cultural factors that influence interpretation. A child may, for example, be guided to ask, "What does this novel mean to me as a boy, as an European American and as a young adolescent?" Perhaps, more importantly, the child may be guided to consider what the same text may say to a girl, or an African American, or to a parent. The point of these questions is not to suggest that members of different subcultures have nothing in common. It serves to demonstrate that literary texts have multiple meanings that can be seen when the text is viewed from multiple perspectives (Knickerbocker and Rycik, 2006:43).

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004:53) stated that teachers, students and texts play important roles in creating a context that fosters critical literacy – one in which

reading from a critical stance is a natural occurrence that extends beyond the classroom to everyday life experiences. The role of the teacher in initiating and developing critical literacy is multifaceted. It starts with personal understanding and use of critical literacy, modelling reading from a critical stance in everyday teaching and learning experiences and providing access to a variety of texts that represent critical literacy. Children who engage in critical literacy become open-minded, active, strategic readers who are capable of viewing text from a critical perspective. They understand that the information presented in texts, magazines, local newspapers, song lyrics and websites has been authored from a particular perspective for a particular purpose. When learning how to read from a critical perspective, the children know that their ultimate goal is to view the text from a critical stance as naturally as they view it from aesthetic and efferent stances.

To make meaning, means to make sense of an experience and to make an interpretation thereof. When children subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision-making or action, then making meaning becomes learning. A central characteristic of transformative learning is the process of reflection – the intellectual and affective activities that lead to exploration of experiences to develop understanding and appreciation (Tomkins, 2009:124).

According to McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004:54) becoming critically literate is a developmental process. To engage and learn more about understanding critically, it is necessary to begin through practice and reflection.

Rosenblatt (2004:1383) believes that the reader adopts a selective attitude or stance while reading, and that they read for a purpose. It is for this reason that I will discuss two central themes that emerged from this research project. They are: finding an authentic voice and gaining identity.

2.3.1.1 Finding an authentic voice

In the learning community of my classroom, an ethos was created where language was used to develop the authentic voices of the children as they critically responded

to 'Superfudge' (1980). In this research project I referred to Cambourne's (1988:33) principles of engagement by firstly immersing the children in the text of *Superfudge'* (1980), secondly demonstrating how texts are constructed and used and thirdly expecting the children to develop and express their authentic voices.

Embedded in the idea of collaborative learning is what cognitive psychologists call, "thinking out loud". In order to learn, children need the opportunity to think and talk about what they are doing. As they talk, they hear themselves while others learn to recognise that which they do and do not understand (Wang, 2007:152).

When children write poems, letters or academic essays, they do not only consider the demands of the task, but how much of their own history and experience will be relevant. Language learning engages the identities of children because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs or symbols, but it is a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined by the value and meaning ascribed to the person that speaks and making their voice heard (Moje & Luke, 2009:415).

Moje and Luke (2009:416) suggested that both 'what' and 'how' one reads and writes can have an impact on the type of person one is recognised as. It can also be argued that texts can be used as tools for enacting identities in social settings, in addition to constructing self-understandings or developing consciousness amidst conflicted social arrangements.

Personal narratives in the form of the children's own experiences, honour the diversity of voices in the classroom, according to Bernhardt (2009:61). He also felt that they provide an opening for students to reconnect and engage with the curriculum. Another voice to be examined is the contextual voice in books, speeches and essays. This embodies the idea that the human being is a person who signifies – gives and derives meaning to and from the 'things' of the world. This voice opens people's eyes to the numerous complexities underlying the social, political and cultural worlds in which they live. The contextual voice examines the types of

relationships that exist between the interrelated parts and functions that humans call the person and the interrelated structure of knowledge and society they call the external world. Students are cognitively challenged through the means of speaking, writing and reading to think about ways their experiences show their values, beliefs and relationships to others. They are allowed various times throughout the day in the classroom to consider these influences, as well as expressing their responses. This process allows children to realise that they may be facing similar types of challenges to the individuals portrayed in the narrative text.

It is important to consider the meanings of the words people use when sharing personal histories and experiences, states Bernhardt (2009:62). He mentioned that the words used for the expression of personal experiences, represent the narrative voice and influence how people construct, share and represent meaning. While it can be difficult to completely understand the experiences of others, an encounter with them making their voices heard can illuminate the various ways people negotiate, celebrate, traverse and struggle with life. Approaching 'voice' as the medium for the projection of meaning can help students deeply connect with their interests, realities and passions.

2.3.1.2 Gaining identity

Identity is thought to matter as a theoretical and practical construct in literacy research and education, according to Moje and Luke (2009:415), because identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege or marginalise readers and writers as 'struggling' or 'proficient', as 'creative' or 'deviant'. The institutions in which people learn rely heavily on identities to assign labels of progress, particularly in relation to reading and writing skills. These identity labels are associated with literacy practices and can be especially powerful in an individual's life. In this research project, as the children responded critically to *'Superfudge'* (1980), a classroom culture was created where personal identities were respected and honoured.

Rowsell and Pahl (2007:388) suggested that children's identities can be represented within texts, a concept known as sedimented identities in texts. Children make choices about what modes to use and these choices are evidence of the path they take as meaning makers. For example, when children start to make texts, or produce a drawing at home, the completed text has a history. If it is made at home, it is constructed in relation to the ways of being and doing in the home, to the everyday practices surrounding the text. Rowsell and Pahl (2007:388) argued that texts can be seen as traces of social practice, and their materiality is important in revealing those traces. This could be executed within the writing of an essay, or responding to text in the form of reflective journaling.

Identities can be conceptualised as related to activities as Rowsell and Pahl (2007:388) suggested. When this notion of identity is applied to classroom, childrens' identities are evident in what they do. People learn as part of the same activities through which they act in the world, while performing social actions like identification. Knowledge exists only in activities. Lived practice, or identities in practice, is a key concept here, wherein identities are formed in the space of practice, and in turn, confirmed the process. Rowsell and Pahl worked with the concept of different contexts for identities. They identified that different identities were enacted within different contexts of activity. They examined the participation of children in out-of-school learning to prove that identities were made and constructed in different communities of practice.

One of the primary themes addressed by researchers currently investigating adolescence and adolescent literacy is the construction of adolescent identity.

From traditional developmental stage theories (Serafini, Bean & Readence, 2004:482) that described adolescents as peer-orientated youth controlled by raging hormones to a socio-cultural and postmodern view of adolescence where social factors are considered to be as important as biological determinants, researchers have been enlarging their understandings of what it means to be an adolescent, how adolescence is defined and how adolescent identities are constructed. Serafini et al (2004:482) continued, stating that traditional definitive conceptions of adolescence as

a time of turbulence, raging hormones, and immaturity diminish adolescents' voices and agency. These conceptions downplay adolescents' individuality and diversity. An emerging awareness of adolescence as socially constructed, rather than biologically determined, helps create space for new understandings of adolescents and what they need to achieve in school. There is also a significant difference in the manner in which girls and boys respond to the changes that occur within this stage of their lives. Edwards (2002:1) explained that there is significant diversity in social, physical, psychological and verbal growth between boys and girls.

Hartley-Brewer (2007:72) commented that girls can become competitive over their looks, friendships and even their performance at school. They frequently get upset about their perceived imperfections and their latest unpleasant experiences. Boys prefer to fight for position. They want to become the pack leader and the class clown. Their physical strength and sporting achievements are used to gain status and smaller boys are often left out. What was once confidence becomes tainted by self-doubt.

Hartley-Brewer (2007:72) continued, stating that girls claim to feel good when: parents and friends are supportive, when they are treated as responsible people and they are reassured, praised, listened to and acknowledged when they have succeeded at something. They also appreciate it when parents and friends want to spend time with them. Girls can feel upset because of: sarcasm, criticism, unfavourable comparisons and when they do not feel as if they have a special talent or look as attractive as they would like to.

In contrast to girls, boys claim to feel good when: parents and friends recognise and acknowledge the things that they are good at, they appreciate it when they have tried hard, they recognise and accept them as they are, want to spend time with them and do fun things together, they respect their privacy and 'don't tattle' (Hartley-Brewer, 2007:72). Individuals may differ based on personality rather than gender, but many conclusions reinforce preconceived stereotypes – girls are better at language

development and boys are more aggressive and have stronger spatial skills (Edwards, 2002:1).

Jones (2009:287) suggested that the complexities of identity development in a postmodern world are not fully captured without attention to multiple and intersecting identities and the socio-cultural contexts in which identities are constructed and negotiated.

Rosenblatt (2004:1373) posited that the aesthetic reader pays attention to the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities and emotions the 'lived-through' meaning is felt to correspond to the text. During the research project, three themes that connected to Rosenblatt's theory of reading with an aesthetic stance, were: the entertainment value of the novel, family dynamics with specific reference to siblings and the relocation of families. Each theme will be discussed in more detail.

2.3.1.1 The entertainment value of the novel

Reading literature for pleasure offers several benefits. Firstly, readers pay attention to those aesthetic qualities of texts that entertain or please the ears. They are also given an opportunity to identify with familiar experiences captured in stories. This enhances meaning-making. In transacting personal meaning, readers gain ownership of the text and create their own texts from the reading experience (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997:446).

When children start reading for pleasure, good things will follow (MacDonell, 2004:33). Their reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, spelling and grammar will improve. Reading for pleasure and being entertained by the content of the reading material leads to success. Those who do not develop a habit of reading for pleasure "will have a difficult time reading and writing at a level high enough to deal with the demands of today's world" (MacDonell, 2004:33).

According to Krashen (2003:50), reading aloud to children has been considered by many researchers to be the single most important activity in developing a child's literacy. It has been repeatedly shown that higher adult interactions with students lead to enhanced student literacy. Krashen and Von Sprecken (2002:19) advised that teachers should be concerned about the small percentage of students who do not enjoy reading, and need to ensure that good reading material is available and that children are exposed to good stories. Younger readers who engage in more literacy activities at home and who have positive experiences with 'read-alouds' show greater interest in reading. Those who read regularly for pleasure are healthier, more active citizens. Krashen and Von Sprecken's (2002:19) research shows that habitual readers are more likely to exercise, volunteer and participate in community activities. Most importantly, once a child or teenager becomes a proficient reader, he or she will always be able to learn through the world of books, magazines, newspapers and the internet.

Duncan (2010:90) commented that teachers are overwhelmed with too much to cover, as well as an endless list of tasks to accomplish between the first bell and the final report card. In addition to helping children master the curriculum and prepare for assessments, there seems to be the never-ending stream of surprise fire-drills and last minute assemblies that reduce instruction time. But between the business and bustle of the school year, teachers must not forget to help children cultivate one of the most important habits they can possess: the practice of regular reading.

Most children's literature relies on "the tension between instruction and entertainment", according to Gruner (2009:216). If children are entertained by the information they are presented with, both through reading and listening, they remain interested and learning will take place. The types of children's literature selected needs to meet this need for entertainment in order for children to take pleasure in the content of the stories with which they are presented.

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MacDonell (2004:31) understood the importance of making readers out of children long before they reach high school. Children need to take pleasure in reading if they

are going to take an interest in reading without being forced to do so as an academic practice. She continued, stating that parents and teachers cannot afford to underestimate the principle of pleasure when it comes to developing children who are readers. Early reading experts say that reading aloud to a child is an ideal stimulation for that child's mind because it involves visual, auditory, interactive attention processes in a pleasurable context. If this is true at age two or three, it should also be at age ten or fifteen.

The origin of a book called "Fourth-Grade Reading Slump" was traced by MacDonell (2004:32), to the work of Chall (1983:67). According to Chall, children lose interest in reading around this age. She continues, stating that the acquisition of Grade 4 reading is a major milestone in a child's education. MacDonell disagreed with this theory. She concluded that the "slump" simply does not exist and that children seem to be reading less because reading materials including comic books, magazines and joke books are often deemed unworthy of the term "reading". MacDonell suggested that the negativity regarding reading does not come from the children, but rather from what they are taught to believe about reading. Due to the stimulation that children require to remain interested in reading, it is often those reading materials that are not viewed as being worthy of the term "reading", that entertain the children and ensure that they develop a love for reading.

2.3.1.2 Family dynamics with specific reference to siblings

During this critical reader experience, five themes emerged as the children expressed how they made meaning from '*Superfudge*' (1980), both verbally and in writing. They expressed empathy and an understanding for the main character in the novel, as they related to the dynamics within Peter's family. The notion of 'family dynamics' is explored in this section.

Brown et al (2009:185), stated that the child's sense of self is likely to be determined by a vast array of social interactions and life experiences, as well as by the cognitive processes with which they interpret these experiences. Still, developmentalists have

long privileged the role of the family in a child's emergent personality. It is family relationships that have received the most attention as possible correlations of early self-concepts.

Emotion regulation processes are recognised as significant components of children's social development, preparing them for pro-social interactions with parents and peers, according to Kennedy and Kramer (2008:568). Emotion regulation refers to the dynamic interaction of multiple behavioural, psychophysiological, attentional and affective systems that allow young children to participate effectively in their social world. Emotion regulation abilities also help children to form more harmonious relationships with siblings. The relationship between siblings is highly complex and, at times, very sensitive.

Sibling relationships can be highly emotionally charged and result in frustrating relationships for children, according to Kennedy and Kramer (2008:567). They presented an 'incomplete list' of the specific competencies that recent research identifies as important for the establishment of pro-social sibling relationships. Emotion regulation features highly on this list, because it is considered to support relevant social competencies. The ability to engage in appropriate social behaviours rests strongly on one's ability to manage emotional experiences and behaviours. For example, productive conflict management is unlikely to occur with a sibling if a child is experiencing high levels of frustration, anger, or other negative emotions that are not effectively regulated. According to Kennedy and Kramer (2008:567), "emotion regulation consists of extrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features to accomplish one's goals". Kennedy and Kramer (2008:567) commented that emotion regulation was initially viewed as evidence of children's ability to control the expression of negative emotions. They suggest that there is a growing recognition that a complex construct plays an instrumental role in shaping children's social competence and, in particular, their ability to perform productive, interpersonal relationships, as proof of this initial theory.

Strengthening a child's ability to regulate negative affect in the sibling context can be an important mechanism for reducing sibling conflict and enhancing pro-social sibling interaction, according to Kennedy and Kramer (2008:567). To reinforce the importance of the sibling dynamic, Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro (2003:135) mentioned a two-part series in which they focused on developing a theory of a group interaction based on peer and sibling issues in group therapy. Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro viewed peer relatedness, specifically referring to siblings, not as a derivative of the parent-child relationship, but as having a separate developmental line and providing a primary source of self-esteem. Schacter (in Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2003:135) noted that in families, sibling contrasts seem to be largely benign, even beneficial. For example, one sibling might be more extroverted and socially adept, another more thoughtful and reflective. This reduces sibling rivalry or conflict, as each child settles on his own 'turf', without intrusion from the other.

Parental influence, according to Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro contributes heavily in the beginning of a child's life in shaping sibling roles. This continues to affect the manner in which older siblings handle and resolve conflict. In better-functioning families, parents help to model appropriate conflict resolution, appreciation of similarities and differences, and they ensure that respect for the integrity of the sibling subsystem is in place. Parents who constantly select favourites, violate the necessary boundaries to develop parent-child alliances. They may compare their children with one another in critical ways and contribute to the development of conflictual, and even potentially abusive, sibling interactions. Due to sibling connections being rooted in ambivalence, they are likely to be more stressful and more volatile than most other human relationships. Love and hate can be viewed as the two sides of the sibling coin. On the one side is sibling rivalry, on the other, psychological closeness, supportive caretaking, direct instruction, and modelling of developmental milestones providing balance. Beginning in childhood, siblings are continually comparing the amount of attention they receive from parents with the amount their brothers and sisters receive. Siblings who perceive themselves as less favoured, or who actually are less favoured, may develop an unsatisfying relationship with, or retaliate against, a weaker sister or brother (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2003:135).

2.3.1.3 Relocation of families

All human beings want to experience a sense of belonging. Children in particular need to feel part of a special group, or at least, a community. For some children these warm, family places may seem unreal or unimaginable. Many books offer children a demonstration of what is possible within a family or community, together with a sense of hope for them that they too might be able to experience the love and support of a family someday (Mcleod et al, 2008:168).

The relocation of families often expects a certain amount of resilience from the children involved in the move. Different aspects of resilience may be important for different developmental stages and life stresses, according to Baldrige, Eddleston and Veiga (2006:131). There is a general tendency towards a sliding scale of the negative effects of moving house. Some factors found to have positive effects on adjustment, have been the importance of a positive parental, particularly maternal, attitude towards the move (Baldrige et al, 2006:131).

Baldrige et al (2006:131) suggested that, although children who have experienced a move were found to be adversely affected both academically and behaviourally, controlled studies indicated that these problems were present prior to their relocation. In contrast to these studies, Baldrige et al (2006:131) referred to the work of Pribesh and Downey who were emphatic that, taking all else into consideration, the moving itself matters. They were unable to identify any group that benefitted from moving.

In contrast to Pribesh and Downey's notions, Hendershott (1989:219) suggested that it is speculated that any relationships found between mobility and adolescent self-concept and depression may be mediated by social support. Thus for adolescents, a supportive network of friends may mediate the impact of moving.

Allen (2008:91) interviewed a number of individuals, enquiring about their feelings towards relocating. Choosing a space and deciding to expend the energy necessary to make it 'home' was not an easy decision for one of the participants, Tom. He shared:

I think there is probably a factor of letting go of the last place you've been to, and I think that you have to hold on to it for some period of time because I think that's probably a healthy transition, but at some point you have to let it go and accept that some things that you like about your old place aren't going to be the same...it allows you to move on. (Allen, 2008:91)

Another participant, Daniel said:

You get out of a place what you put into it...You can be happy, pretty much anywhere but you have to give something of yourself in order to get something from the place. You can't just expect to move in and be happy right away. You have to be willing to sacrifice a part of yourself, some of your time, some of your energy, some of your ideas in order to make a place home. You can't just move in and hang the pictures on the wall and say 'ok this is home – where are all my friends?!'...If you don't want it to be home, it will never be home. And if you want it to be home, it will be home very quickly for you. (Allen, 2008:91)

Baldrige et al (2006:131) commented that it is important to consider the impact of the strength of children's community ties on family well-being and individual's willingness to relocate. For example, relocating children to a new school in a new community becomes more difficult when children have developed strong ties to schools, and loyalty in relationships with their teachers and friends. For these reasons, the perceived strength of children's community ties are associated with less willingness to relocate. There is an important socio-emotional cost of relocation that may result in potential problems in the overall well-being of a family.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which critically informed and guided the design of my research. In terms of where the children were in their stage of development during the research process, five socio-cultural theories were necessary to explain the development of their critical reader-responses: engagement, mediation, zone of proximal development, scaffolding and Erikson's industry versus inferiority. The critical reader-response themes were explored through a plethora of current researchers in the literacy field.

It is my contention that *Superfudge* (1980) has been an appropriate tool for mediating all the facets of development mentioned in the theoretical framework and literature review.

Chapter 3 discusses the rationale for the main research design.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 The research question

The key focus question asks:

“What are the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to one novel written by Judy Blume?”

The investigation seeks to progressively answer the following sub-question:

- What are the common themes within the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to a novel written by Judy Blume?

This section introduces and discusses the research approach used in this study. This research was qualitative and the two instruments used to collect the data were video interviews and reflective journalling. I used grounded theory in the research approach. Creswell (2009:229) describes this approach as, “a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants in the study”.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morisson (2007:491), grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. It is emergent, rather than predefined and is generated as a consequence of systematic data collection and analysis. Grounded theory catches the naturalistic element of research and formulates it into a systematic methodology. The aim is not to reduce complexity by breaking it down into variables, but rather to include complexity by including context. In the research project, the critical reader responses that emanated from the analyses were not predefined and were determined by the participants from whom data was collected. As can be seen in

Chapter 2, there is a strong link between the results and the literature. These results and well-developed concepts were systematically generated from and grounded in the data.

Creswell (2009:130) explains, "in grounded theory, the questions may be directed towards generating a theory of some process, such as the exploration of a process... In a qualitative case study, the questions may address a description of the case and the themes that emerge from studying it." In my research project, from the analysis of the data, themes were generated that emerged from the responses of the participants in the study.

3.2 Methodology and design

This research design was implemented in order to gather and analyse information, ultimately aiding me in arriving at a conclusion. The approach was qualitative and only open-ended questions were used during the video interviews, as well as the reflective journaling.

The video interviews and the reflective journaling were not piloted, but I had the freedom to omit questions or add new ones as the research progressed. The video interviews, as well as the reflective journaling were completed by Grade 4's in November 2008.

One of the strengths of the use of grounded theory within this research project is the systematic generation of the various themes which emerged from the data. It was an inductive process in which everything was integrated. The data patterned itself, while I organised it into five themes. Another strength of grounded theory is that it does not aim not to reduce complexity, but rather to add complexity by including context. (Cohen et al, 2007:491). However, a weakness of grounded theory is that it begins with data, which are then analysed and reviewed to enable the theory to be generated from them – therefore, it is rooted in data and little else.

Cohen et al (2007:492) state that grounded theory presents a number of challenges for the researcher. These challenges include: tolerance and openness to data and what is emerging, resistance to premature formulation of theory, paying close attention to data, willingness to engage in the process of theory generation rather than theory testing and having the ability to work with emergent categories rather than preconceived or received categories.

3.2.1 Sample of this study

There were nineteen Grade 4 children in the class who participated in the study. There were seven girls and twelve boys in the class, all aged between nine and eleven years of age. As previously mentioned the children resided in various areas around Cape Town, Green Point, Sea Point, Fresnaye, Camps Bay, Hout Bay, Milnerton and the Cape Town City Bowl.

3.2.2 Video interviews

In 2008, I used video interviews to collect data from the Grade 4 children in the class that I was teaching that year. The research was conducted in order to discover the critical reader-responses of the children in the study. The children were presented with questions which they voluntarily answered verbally, while being recorded on film. These responses were analysed in order to discover possible themes which emerged, as well as the critical reader responses of the participants. The video interviews which were conducted were semi-structured. The questions asked were open-ended and allowed the participants to share their opinions and thoughts. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed. The interview protocol as mentioned in Creswell (2009:183), was followed during the research process: the questions followed an initial ice-breaker type question and were followed by a concluding statement. I probed for the questions in order to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail, encouraging them to elaborate on what they said. There were intervals between all the questions in order for the researcher to record all the responses of the participants.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the manner in which children make meaning of the texts with which they are presented in the classroom. The children were all given a copy of the novel, *Superfudge* (Blume,1980), they were allowed either to follow in their books as I read to them, or they could relax and recline, simply enjoying being read to. The video interviews were conducted during the examination period towards the end of the academic year. The questions were open-ended prompts and included the following:

1. What was your favourite part of the story? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Who was your favourite character? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Which character did you relate to the best? Give a reason for your answer.
4. Do you prefer reading on your own or do you prefer being read to? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Do you think reading is important? Give a reason for your answer.

The assumption upon which the research project is based was that the novel that was chosen for Grade 4 children was being responded to critically by the readers. It was also assumed that the Grade 4 children would all enjoy the novel presented to them.

3.2.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of using the video interviews in the current investigation

The children enjoyed being filmed and twelve participants volunteered their answers to all the questions. These children participated and contributed willingly and appreciated the attention that they received from being interviewed and filmed. The major advantage was that the responses were spontaneous and authentic. Upon analysis of the data collected through means of this method, it was a simple process to transcribe the responses accurately and thoroughly. Another advantage of using video interviews in this investigation was that the facial expressions and body

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language which added to the richness of the data. It was easy for me to be able to add exclamation marks where necessary, for example, based on the manner in which the responses were given.

As Creswell (2009:179) states, one of the advantages of video interviews is that it is “useful when participants cannot be directly observed...it allows the researcher control over the line of questioning.” He explains that “it provides an opportunity for participants to share their reality, that it is creative and captures attention visually.”

The disadvantage of this form of data collection was the fact that many of the children did not volunteer answers since they claimed to be shy of speaking in front of the camera. As Creswell suggests, data collected from video interviews “may be difficult to interpret.” All the children were encouraged to contribute, but many proceeded to give one-line responses which were not particularly helpful in my research. Some of the children enjoyed the attention of being filmed to the extent that they just said anything that came to mind, in order to keep the camera on them. This caused the transcription process to take longer than it should have, since it was necessary to omit all the contributions which were irrelevant to the study.

3.2.3 Reflective journalling

Reflective journalling is a fairly new data collection approach. Creswell (2009:182) describes this practice as, ‘having a participant keep a journal or diary during the research study.’ Creswell (2009:42) devoted an entire book to concepts he called “reflective thinking, reflection-in-action, as well as reflective practice; this is after an entire book was written a decade earlier to introduce the concepts.”

Reflective journalling was used during the process of collecting data in this research project. It allowed the children to respond to the various guided questions without the threat or intimidation of having to answer questions verbally. Many of the participants expressed a preference for this method of response because it allowed them the freedom to offer their opinion and perspective freely. The children were given forty-

five minutes to write in their journals, which allowed them time to give significant thought to their responses before putting them down on paper.

3.2.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of using the reflective journaling method in the current investigation

The reflective journaling activity proved to be a very useful tool in this investigation. There were many advantages to this method which will be explained in detail. Firstly, a significant advantage was that the children responded on paper, making the transcription process much easier by providing a hard copy of their contributions to work with and refer back to when necessary. As Creswell (2009:180) comments, the advantages of collecting data through means of documents include the fact that it “enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of the participants, it can be accessed at a time convenient to the researcher and it represents data which are thoughtful in that students have given attention to compiling them. He adds that “as written evidence, it saves a researcher the time and expense of transcribing”. The children were given approximately forty-five minutes to think, allowing them to give careful thought to their responses and to change their mind during the recording process. They were not under pressure to use the correct grammar or vocabulary, since it was emphasised that these aspects of language would not be assessed. They were constantly reminded that their honest responses were all that mattered during this research project and they were commended for giving ample feedback. They were allowed to respond in writing privately and did not have an opportunity to be 'silly' in front of their peers, nor to draw attention to themselves by using complex words or giving lengthy responses. The responses were varied and thorough, giving me rich data to use within the research project.

Creswell (2009:180) mentions a few possible limitations to this type of data collection. They are as follows: “not all people are equally articulate and perceptive, it requires transcribing or optically scanning for computer entry, materials may be incomplete and documents may not be authentic or accurate.”

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I discovered a number of disadvantages to using reflective journaling as a method of collecting data. Firstly, many participating children lacked confidence when writing and proceeded to write the minimum when responding to the questions they were presented with. I had to probe them and finally I gave them a minimum number of words which they had to write for each response. Another disadvantage was the fact that I had reiterated the lack of importance of correct spelling and grammar, which resulted in careless spelling and grammar from the children. Their handwriting was poor, since they were aware that the activity was not for academic assessment purposes and it was at the end of the school year when they were tired and did not pay attention to the presentation of their responses. This would not have been a problem if I had not needed to transcribe their responses. These aspects simply made it difficult for me to decipher their contributions.

3.3 Thoroughness in approach

One needs to remember that the majority of the children came from wealthy homes where both parents worked and they were looked after by an au-pair or child-minder. Teacher quality needs to be considered here as well. A teacher who, for example, was careless about getting to know the children in their classroom, might have approached this novel with little or no sensitivity. It is important for a teacher to bear issues such as divorce, or sibling rivalry in mind when discussing the novel verbally, as well as when questioning the children. It is imperative that a teacher's knowledge of diversity in the classroom is sound. This sensitivity certainly would influence the manner in which he or she managed the classroom and planned lessons. A novel such as *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) should not only be read to the children, but meaningful discussions as well as a platform for the children to ask relevant questions should be in place. It is also of the utmost importance that a teacher displays a positive attitude towards reading, as the children are more likely to adopt this attitude if it is undeniably evident in their teacher.

As mentioned previously, the majority of the children in the study came from supportive home environments where reading was an everyday activity which was

encouraged within the home, although few of them were being read to by parents. Many of the children mentioned that they enjoyed the fact that the novel was read aloud to them. SB commented that he appreciated being able to recline and simply delight in listening to the text being read to him. Unfortunately, despite the educated culture in which they were living, the lack of exposure to literature, as well as the lack of being read to, did not lend itself to a genuine love for reading in many of the homes from which these children came. Parental involvement is vital in this regard. Children also need to be encouraged to read for understanding and not simply for the sake of recognising words at a certain speed. Compulsory reading tasks are given as homework. These are usually completed without parental supervision and are seldom done for pleasure. As a result children are not often given the opportunity to read aloud out of the school context. When children read aloud in the classroom, the difference between those who practise regularly and those who do not, is unmistakable. This is evident in the confidence and fluency displayed when children read aloud.

3.4 Validity and reliability

Creswell and Miller (2009:190) describe validity as being, "one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account."

When checking for reliability, Yin (2009:45) explains that "the objective of the research is to be sure that, if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same case study all over again, the later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions".

Creswell (2009:235) expands on the concept of validity, explaining that "validity strategies in qualitative research are procedures that qualitative researchers use to demonstrate the accuracy of their findings and convince readers of this accuracy". Further discussions on validity will be found in Chapter 5.

3.5 Data analysis of this study

The data which was collected from this study was analysed qualitatively, by means of discovering the various themes which emerged from the critical reader-responses of the children in the study. The responses to the open-ended questions were categorised and interpreted according to the themes that emerged and were linked to the theoretical framework presented in the literature review.

3.6 Ethical considerations

A letter was sent to all the participants' parents, requesting their permission for their children to participate in the study. The letter also gave a brief explanation of the reason for the research, as well as the fact that their children would be allowed to volunteer their responses and would not be forced to participate. The children were also told that they were under no obligation to contribute and that they could refuse to answer the questions.

The names of the respondents have not been used for confidentiality reasons. Instead the initials of each of the children have been used.

I requested permission from the principal to conduct the research at the school. This letter can be seen in Appendix 2 on page 116. He was informed of the details of the study, as seen in Appendix 1 on page 114. In July 2008 I was granted permission from him to conduct the study in my classroom, on condition that I did not use teaching time for my research.

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the research question, it explained the research approach and gave a thorough description of the methods which were used. It proceeded to give a detailed explanation of the methodology, the sample, the analysis of the data,

as well as the ethical considerations which were considered during this investigation. The results and analysis of this study are discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

A concise and detailed account of the interviews and reflective journal entries has been recorded in this chapter. A full description and analytic discussion of emerging themes within the reader-responses to the prescribed novel will follow.

The purpose of this research project was to enable the participants to respond verbally and in writing to the text they had been given – *Superfudge* by Judy Blume (1980). The emphasis was on the children's own thoughts and opinions being expressed, rather than their language abilities. The significance and benefits of reflective journalling as a 'non-academic' activity were investigated, as well as the themes that occurred whilst recording the participants' responses to the literature. The written journalling was a unique experience for the participants and it offered them an opportunity to step back from themselves and take a new stance if they chose; it also provoked reflection and deliberation.

The group of children who participated in this study were from similar affluent backgrounds. Therefore, I felt it important to expose them to children's literature that dealt with social issues with which they were not familiar. This provided them with an experience of making meaning from a text where the characters were involved with complex, subtle and controversial issues, which was one of the aims behind this research.

4.1.1 My role as the teacher and researcher

As the teacher of the children in the sample, as well as the researcher, the process proved to be more challenging in some areas and less challenging in others. As mentioned before, I chose to begin my data collection during the examination period.

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4.1.1 My role as the teacher and researcher

As the teacher of the children in the sample, as well as the researcher, the process proved to be more challenging in some areas and less challenging in others. As mentioned before, I chose to begin my data collection during the examination period.

I did this because I did not want the process to infringe on the academic timetable. The examination period allowed me the opportunity to use the time which had been scheduled for general class time. The children wrote their examinations in the morning and were allowed a certain amount of time to study for the next examination. That allowed me at least an hour each day to read, conduct the video interviews or give the children an opportunity to write in their journals. This was executed towards the end of the year, when a secure, cooperative relationship between myself and the children was already in place. This resulted in a certain level of comfort, because the children were able to be themselves, without feeling the need to impress others or prove themselves.

Superfudge (Blume, 1980) was not the first novel that I, as the group's class teacher, had read to them and they expressed enthusiasm when they discovered that they would not be reading for assessment. Immediately there was no pressure on them to perform and they were simply able to listen. I allowed the children to relax and explained to them that these sessions were not for academic purposes nor linked to formative nor summative assessment. Unfortunately this meant that the children did not take as much care in the presentation of their written responses and it was challenging to make meaning of their poor handwriting and careless spelling errors. Despite some written responses being challenging to decipher, there were many substantial responses which were valuable in this process.

There were a couple of general discipline issues that occurred during sessions, just as there would have been during our normal lessons. However, I did not want to express my frustrations, because I wanted to create a safe environment where the children could freely express their opinions. Some of the less mature children made irrelevant contributions to the video interviews, in order to make their classmates laugh. There were occasions when some of the boys in the class became restless. However, this did not disrupt the flow of the story.

The children displayed a considerable level of honesty in their responses. I already knew many of their situations because as their class teacher I had access to all their records and I had a general awareness of their home situations. Their responses were not written to impress me nor to make themselves appear to be different from whom they were nor where they came from. They were authentic and the majority of the children respected the research I was conducting. However, what became challenging during the analysis process was differentiating my position as class teacher from that of the researcher.

I read aloud in order for the participants to enjoy *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980). Oral reading in our curriculum is considered an aim for classroom instruction because of its relevance in people's daily lives for recreation and sharing information.

We moved away from simply reading for the sake of fluency and pronunciation, towards an objective involving the development of basic comprehension skills. I chose to read the novel aloud to the children and they rarely offered to read *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) themselves. There were only five occurrences during the four week period of reading *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) where the participants offered to read a full page aloud to the class. Since this reading occurred at the end of the academic year, these breaks were a welcome relief to me. Four of them mentioned that they enjoyed the opportunity of simply listening to the story and not focusing on difficult reading skills such as fluency and pronunciation.

The question was asked: Did you prefer being read to or reading the book by yourself?

Three of the children commented during the video interviews as follows:

NC	I preferred it when you read to us because it's really hilarious when you speak and I anyway don't read by myself so I do enjoy you reading it to us.
SD	I preferred it when you read the book because you read much faster and you make the voices and the reason I don't want to read it on my own is because I read it much slower.
SBa	I preferred you reading to us because you made the voices for certain characters and you made it funny.

4.2 Findings: Answers to the two research questions.

As presented in Chapter 1, the key focus question over-arching the empirical current research investigation is as follows:

What are the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 learners to a novel written by Judy Blume?

The answer to this question will be shown by progressively answering the following sub-question:

What are the common themes within reader-responses to the prescribed novel?

The verbal and the written responses of the children were recorded in order to analyse them individually. When necessary, either the verbal or written responses have been analysed separately. I have looked at how the text affected the children's responses, how their previous life experiences influenced their interpretation, as well as the context in which the verbal and written feedback was given. In my classroom I have viewed readers as individuals, each with their own interests and reading habits. Since the discussions were held in the class, the children's responses were immediate and authentic. It was interesting to observe that throughout the process the students' enthusiasm for the novel did not waver; they maintained a positive attitude towards the novel. Throughout the reflective journaling process, within the current research on critical reader-responses, five themes began to emerge on a regular and consistent basis. These themes were discussed in detail within the literature review on pages 32 – 44. They were: finding an authentic voice, gaining identity, the entertainment value of the novel, family dynamics with specific reference to siblings and relocation of families. These themes will now be discussed in more detail.

Although there were many themes that became obvious during my analysis of the reader-responses, it was difficult to separate the issues explicitly into different

categories. Therefore, some issues may have been referred to in more than one theme. The subject matter in *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) served as a major motivation when reading aloud to the participating children. When we discussed narrative text, such notions as action-packed, humorous plots were frequently mentioned. The importance of these issues was illustrated in the children's responses.

Although the novel used in this research project was first published in 1980, many of the issues that arose in this novel, such as moving from one city to another, sibling rivalry and the death of a pet, are matters which children still grapple with in the twenty-first century. The novel allowed the children an opportunity to compare their own situations with those of the characters within the novel. I was under the impression that I knew the children that I taught as individuals, yet during the process of reading the novel, the stories that were shared allowed me to gain a deeper insight into the lives of the children in my care. They were offered a platform to participate in discussions that were initiated by the circumstances of the characters within the story. Due to this, the children were afforded the opportunity to discuss the manner in which they were able to identify with the situations that occurred in the novel.

The main character in *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) was Peter Hatcher, a ten-year old boy living in a middle-class American family, and the focus was on his relationships with siblings, peers, parents and neighbours. Other characters included his younger brother, Fudge, who was the cause of many embarrassing moments, as well as his dog, Turtle. Due to the age of the boy in the story, as well as his family dynamics, the novel was well-suited to the age group that comprised the sample. Initially the children were hesitant to become involved during the interviewing process, but once they began to engage with the text they embraced the opportunity to give verbal and written feedback.

The reader must bear in mind that reading for understanding is an intricate cognitive venture, which is influenced by a number of factors, including the reader, the text, as well as the context. As a result of these factors the children's interpretations differed. The questions that were asked after reading the text allowed the children to

comprehend the text rather than simply examining it. These questions selected very carefully. The focus of the construction of the meaning of the text was centred on the social aspects of these sessions in addition to their individual interpretation. The discussions held in class encouraged the children to share their opinions with one another, allowing them to make meaning as a cohort. However, even though the basic comprehension of the text was similar, due to a number of contributing factors including personality differences, home environments and socio-economic circumstances, their interpretation of the text as far as how they related to it differed amongst the children.

4.2.1 Common themes within reader-responses

Five themes became evident during the analysis. I derived these themes through inductive analysis of the video interviews (VI) and reflective journaling (RJ). Many questions were posed, encouraging the children to interpret the text in their own ways and to reflect critically on the relevance of the various scenarios in the novel to their own situations. There were no predetermined categories brought to this analysis and they emerged after all the data was gathered. The following five themes emerged as the data began to be analysed: (1) finding an authentic voice; (2) gaining identity; (3) the entertainment value of the novel; (4) family dynamics with specific reference to siblings and (5) relocation of families. Each theme, as well as its emergence within the data collection process, will be discussed in more detail below.

The discussions held in class regarding the novel, helped the children to explore their own opinions and beliefs about the various social aspects. It was due to this notion that my research offered the children an opportunity to respond individually and share their opinions with one another in a non-threatening and informal context.

The discussions which were held in the classroom, prior to the formal reflection process, were imperative in order to ensure that all the children understood the text, especially in the context of the continuation of the previous novel which was studied earlier in the year.

4.2.1.1 Finding an authentic voice

The purposeful use of this novel and the open-ended communicative opportunities to use the text and link the themes to their own lives provided the participants with an opportunity to find and use their authentic voice. The children took the information from the text and applied it to their lives – that of being Grade 4 children. This more nuanced finding of 'expressing their authentic voice' became evident through both the discourse regarding siblings and the context of being Grade 4 children, as well as in their personal written journal entries.

Luke and Freebody stated that the concept of 'voice' refers to the opportunity to express oneself in freedom without regard to power or position (in Ciardiello, 2004:142).

The characters in the novel could not always express their authentic voices verbally and, therefore, conveyed them through alternative means. Examples of this behaviour in the novel were when Peter immediately began to pack his bags, threatening to move out when he heard the news that their family was moving to Princeton. Another example was when Fudge's friend, Daniel gave him a lecture about the history of the Myna bird, as well as Fudge disciplining his bird, Uncle Feather, as though the bird comprehended everything. Alex dressing up in a costume called 'Anita's Anger', representing the painting that his father made as a response to Alex's mother abandoning them, was his way to express his feelings towards the situation. These were all alternative means of communicating various emotions, ensuring that the characters made their voices heard.

During this research project, the means of 'finding an authentic voice' for the participants was achieved through video interviews and the written journaling. The children were encouraged to respond honestly and were reminded repeatedly that they were not being assessed on grammar, speech, handwriting nor spelling. They

were also allowed the freedom to express themselves without time constraints. Due to the lack of limitations, the children's authentic voices became apparent.

Eight references were made to the novel resembling the phase of the children's lives, as well as being suitable for this particular age group.

These were the video interview responses

KF	I think Superfudge is a good book because it's similar to our lives. Everyone goes through this phase or stage of life.
AP	I think Superfudge is very good for people who are going through this phase.
GV	Superfudge is a very humorous book directed at children who are not having a lot of attention...they can see that they are not by themselves.
JJ	It resembles someone's life and while you read it you understand how a person feels and reacts to the problems and while it happens you can also get a laugh here or there.

These were the reflective journal responses

KF	I'm sure the whole grade loves it.
DdS	It is suitable for us.
DN	It is a good choice because it is easy and funny to read. Its also a very nice book to and I also think it is not so thick.
AP	I think this book is a good choice for Grade 4. Because it is funny and very interesting.

During the reflection process, the children relished the opportunity to freely express themselves without guidelines and restrictions. This resulted in their being able to communicate with sincerity and untainted truthfulness.

4.2.1.2 Gaining identity

Issues around identity also became apparent in the responses of the participants. The children learnt much from the novel and were able to relate it to their own situation. Through means of verbalising their opinions and thoughts, as well as answering guided questions, they created their own knowledge of the text and as a

result, they discovered more about themselves, adding to the formation of their identities.

The question of which character they were able to relate to the most, as well as what similarities existed between their lives and the novel, gave the children an opportunity to compare themselves with a neutral individual of a similar age. JJ had the following to say regarding this notion:

Well, my favourite character is Peter and I relate to him because I'm like more mature and it's not like Fudge who always breaks things.

This theme linked directly to the theme of gaining identity between the lives of the children and the characters in the novel. It was the primary aim of this research to discover the critical reader-responses of the children within the study, and their responses led to 'gaining identity' emerging as a theme. There was a strong link between self- and social awareness and literature. The children were asked which character they related to the most in the novel. Six of the video interview contributions were very similar:

KF	I related to Peter the most because I also have a little brother...he also gets annoyed with his little brother.
FJ	Sometimes I also brag about how clever I am and sometimes I can also get jealous.
JJ	Well, my favourite character is Peter and I relate to him because I'm more mature and not like Fudge who always breaks things.
JP	Peter, because I also have a baby brother and he's also really annoying.
SB	Fudge more because I play a lot and I don't like studying.
SD	Fudge because I act like him and I make jokes like him.

At this stage in a child's life, there are many influences encouraging them to base their identity on specific notions. When the children were asked how reading compared to watching a movie, their reflective journal responses were as follows:

KF	It is different because in a book you can make up your own pictures and have your own imagination.
SBa	A movie fills your brain with gugee but a book is much better for your brain.
CC	Movies are much cooler.
JP	Well I think a movie is so much more exciting.

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JP	Well I think a movie is so much more exciting.

JL	A movie is faster and we understand it.
AP	Well reading helps you work at school and movies and adverts brainwash you and they are not good for you
SB	A movie is better because you can relax when you watch it.

During the reading process, I witnessed the participants' compassion for Peter. In turn, the participants converted this compassion into a greater awareness of Peter's social setting, which created a deeper understanding of their own identities within their own social contexts.

4.2.1.3 The entertainment value of the novel

The majority of the cohort confirmed that it was the humorous nature of the novel that they appreciated the most. Seventeen of the participants commented on this and many mentioned it more than once in both their verbal and written reflections.

These were the video interview responses:

AP	It was really, really funny and I barely ever laugh.
JJ	Superfudge is a good book because it's really funny and it's about his life and it's actually a good book and funny. You can also get a laugh here or there, because it was really gross, funny, really disgusting... Very funny.
CC	Superfudge is filled with lots of fun and laughter.

These were the reflective journal responses:

NC	The book is funny, it's good, it's nice, it makes me laugh, it's cute and it has a really nice title!
KF	It's a very funny book. I'm sure the whole grade loves it. It made me feel like laughing when something funny happened.

Although the context differed vastly from what they experience today, they were able to relate to the characters and understand the frustrations that Peter had with his baby brother. AP shared that her favourite part of the novel was, "when Peter's friend, Alex, dressed up as a painting which his father had painted, called 'Anita's Anger' for Halloween." She felt that this was the most entertaining part of the novel. The painting had been created in honour of Alex's mother who had left his father and

AP felt that the fact that Alex chose to represent his father's depiction of his mother's anger at Halloween was hilarious.

A number of the children either struggled with reading or they simply did not enjoy reading. They mentioned that they enjoyed listening to *Superfudge* (1980) because it was easy to understand. The children enjoyed being entertained and the book offered great amusement for them. The humorous nature of the novel ensured that the children who were not avid readers were able to enjoy and appreciate reading.

When the children were asked why they enjoyed the novel, five of them said that they found the book easy to understand and follow, because it was interesting and suitable for Grade 4. This was evident in their written as well as their verbal responses. Two of the children admitted to being weak readers and confessed that they appreciated the fact that the novel required little effort to understand. The children were not distracted by complicated or unfamiliar words while reading and the story was discussed by the class as they progressed through it.

A number of the comical events in the novel are in fact of a sad nature, yet it is written in a manner that reminds one of the lightness of life. Situations such as sibling rivalry, moving house and the death of a pet are dealt with, yet the children were entertained and amused by the content of the novel. Fourteen of the participants mentioned the fact that they have experienced similar circumstances and that they were able to relate to the situation of the characters within the book. The issues that frustrated Peter (the main character) coincided with the participants' own frustrations and they enjoyed the hilarity because they were able to associate with it and see it from an alternative perspective.

Some of the moments in the novel that are described by the participants as being funny are the embarrassments and vulgarities within the story. Three participants mentioned that their favourite part of the story was when the little brother, Fudge, started school and proceeded repeatedly to call his teacher 'Ratface'. One child also

commented on the fact that Fudge kept spelling words incorrectly or he would give the correct spelling of a word, but would say that it spelt a totally different word.

The children were asked what their reading preference was. They were asked whether they enjoyed being read to more or if they preferred reading on their own. They were also asked to provide a reason for their preference.

These were the video interview responses:

SBa	I preferred you reading to us because you made the voices for certain characters and you made it funny and stuff.
AP	When you read to us because whenever like Peter spoke you spoke in such a Peter way and whenever Fudgie spoke you spoke in such a baby way and I don't like reading it by myself. I just don't.
GV	I preferred reading it by myself because then you could read at your own, I could read it at my own pace instead of sticking to the pace of the class and in comparison it's quite fast because we didn't read that much of the book every now and then whereas we read by ourselves almost every single day and that's why I finished the book by myself.
NC	I preferred it when you read to us because it's really hilarious when you speak and I anyway don't read by myself so I do enjoy you reading it to us.
SD	Because you read much faster and you make the voices and the reason I don't want to read it on my own is because I read it much more slower.

SBa said that she preferred being read to because the teacher made the appropriate voices for certain characters and that made it funny. SD said he felt he could follow easier, as the book was read at a pace he was comfortable with. The children did not have to concentrate on the actual act of reading, but rather they were able to listen and use their imagination. Only GV remarked that he preferred reading the book on his own, because he was able to read the book at his own pace and finish it before the rest of the class. He felt that it was frustrating having to wait for the rest of the class to catch up with him.

The children were not only entertained by the actual events in the story, but also by the way it was presented to them. They agreed that much of this would have been lost if they had read the novel themselves, possibly missing some of the interesting and funny details in their attempts to comprehend all the new vocabulary. This was

also why four of the children commented that they preferred watching movies to reading books.

4.2.1.4 Family dynamics with specific reference to siblings

The theme of siblings is a fairly prominent one which emerged often within *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980), as well as in the children's responses. Fifteen of the participants came from families where there was more than one child. Those that did not have siblings were able to identify with their peers as a result of social interactions and visits to their friends' homes. Five participants said that they were able to relate to Peter, whose little brother embarrassed him on a regular basis by making inappropriate comments and generally being sociably inept. The awkward moments within the novel caused much amusement to the whole cohort.

Descriptions such as 'annoying', 'frustrating' and 'irritating' were used to illustrate Fudge in the novel. Whilst many children were able to sympathise with Peter, there were a few participants who learnt that they needed to treat their own siblings better. They discovered that they ought to be grateful for them because they were not nearly as annoying as the little brother depicted in the novel. They mentioned that they enjoyed seeing Peter cope with his difficult brother and that it reminded them that they were not the only ones dealing with an impossible sibling. Three of these comments included:

Video interviews

JJ	The character of Peter can show them that it's rather easy to deal with little brothers even though they are slightly annoying. I've learnt that if you have a brother they can be a bit irritating sometimes but you just have to live with them.
KF	I'm glad I'm not the only person that has really annoying siblings and that everyone goes through this phase or stage of life where they get really irritated by their brothers and sisters.

Reflective journals

GV	The main character is like me because he has a frustrating little bother.
----	---

Sibling rivalry was a theme which emerged throughout the novel and it was a source of much entertainment as well as much sympathy. Words such as 'funny', 'hilarious', 'humorous', 'exciting' and 'interesting' were used to describe the events in the story. SB even admitted to nearly 'wetting his pants from laughter'. Five of the children remarked that they were grateful that they did not experience the same frustration and difficulty with their younger siblings as Peter did in the novel. The annoying nature of Fudge made the children laugh often, while many of them commented that they were relieved not to have to put up with the same kinds of irritation.

A positive response to the issue of difficulties with siblings was from HW who claimed that she intended to:

start treating my sister better and be nicer to her. My favourite part was when the mother and father broke the news to Peter that his mother was pregnant because that's how I was when I found out that my mom was pregnant with my baby sister.

KB found a new appreciation for his siblings and noted that he had always thought his brother and sister were 'devils':

but now that I've read the book it looks more like my brother and sister are angels and they are better than Fudge.

Many of the responses revealed the 'love-hate' relationships that the children had with their brothers and sisters. The position they held within their families also played a major part in the way they experienced life and the way that they conducted themselves in friendships. It was comforting for the children to realise that the challenges they faced at home with difficult siblings, were similar to those experienced by many other children worldwide. They were not only able to sympathise with Peter, but they could truly empathise with him in many of the awkward situations in which Fudge placed him .

According to Erikson, (in Harder, 2009) children between the ages of nine and ten, begin to develop social skills which society requires of them. They suddenly have an awareness of others' opinions, as well as what is socially acceptable and what is not. This was why it was so embarrassing for Peter when his brother did things that were socially inappropriate and the children were able to relate to the feeling of humiliation when their siblings brought them shame. Erikson, (in Harder, 2009) states that the whole community contributes to the development of children at this stage. The novel depicts this clearly with many adults and peers, as well as teachers involving themselves in the life of Peter. This links directly with the formation of identity – something which children encounter in Grade 4. This is discussed in detail in section 4.2.1.2 on pages 64 – 66.

Many of the participants adopted an awareness of the role they played as an older sibling in their own families and the irritation they were to their younger brothers and sisters. HW admitted to annoying her baby sister by teasing her when she was playing quietly by herself. MV confessed to annoying his little sister all the time. When the participants were asked which character they related to the best, many of them stated that they related to Fudge, due to the way his brother treated him as well as the way he behaved towards Peter. A number of children shared that they related to Peter, because of the way that he struggled and coped with the immaturity of his younger brother.

The answer to the question of which character the children felt they were able to relate to best included mainly Peter and Fudge. The participants did not hesitate to answer when they were asked to respond verbally while being recorded. KF said

I related to Peter the most because I also have a little brother. I have a big brother, I don't have a little sister but I still have a little brother and also he is the closest to my age and he also gets annoyed with his little brother.

This was an interesting response because she was a ten-year old girl – rather different from the character she was able to relate to. Some of the participants felt

that they were able to relate to Peter because of what he experienced with his brother. KB responded:

I'm more like Peter 'cause my brother, he's just like Fudge – he irritates me a lot. And well, I shout at my brother in the same way as Peter.

The participants identified many embarrassing moments which pertained to having siblings. Peter experienced these moments with Fudge in front of his peers quite frequently, which the participants empathise with. The participants found the incidents when Fudge embarrassed Peter both funny and mortifying as they indirectly experienced what Peter must have felt at the time. GV mentioned:

When Peter said he was going to be leaving and Fudge said 'No Peetah! Don't goooooo!' I thought it was so funny."

MV mentioned:

My favourite part was when Fudge called his teacher 'Ratface' and he was lying on the lockers –no-one would really do that in life that's why it was kind of funny.

Another subject that arose during the reflection process that related to family dynamics was that of pregnancy. In the novel, Peter's mother was pregnant and eventually delivered his baby sister, whose nickname was Tootsie. Although SB responded infrequently throughout the video interviews and the journaling process, he was vociferous and spoke in a baby voice when mentioning how he related to the novel. He said:

...the book is the same because Peter's mom is pregnant with Tootsie except it's not a girl, it's a boy and my mom's also pregnant – with a boy.

He continued, saying:

they are giving the baby a stupid name.

4.2.1.5 Relocation of families

The theme of relocating from one city to another was one that emerged in both the video interviews, as well as the written journals. There were five aspects to this theme: the loneliness and trauma of being forced to adapt to an unfamiliar and new environment, the loss of familiarity of the old life, the fear of not developing new friendships, not being part of the decision-making process of the move and finally the realisation that life in their old environment does not alter significantly during their absence.

In the novel, Peter and his family moved to Princeton – another city – where he had to create new friendships and acclimatise to his new milieu. This was daunting for Peter as he stated:

You think it's fun to go to a new school? I don't even know anybody there. And I definitely don't want to go to school with the little monster. You don't understand anything, do you?
(Blume, 1980:30)

One participant commented on the loneliness and the trauma of being forced to adapt to an unfamiliar and new environment. JP commented:

It was sad because they had to move from New York to Princeton.

FJ also commented on the loss of familiarity of her old life:

This book made me feel happy because I think maybe, just maybe, one day, I would move back to Pretoria, back to my best friends, back to my big house, back to my old school, and here I don't have that, so I would be happy if I moved back.

One of the children commented that they shared Peter's fear of not developing new friendships in their new environment. Peter said:

You think I don't want to stay? I don't know anybody in Princeton. You think I want to go to some school where I don't have any friends? (Blume, 1980:34).

FJ later wrote that she was not part of the decision-making process of the move that her family made:

Peter's parents didn't tell him that they are moving to Princeton. And well I moved to Cape Town and my parents didn't tell me.

Although FJ was not initially part of the decision-making process, after completion of the novel, she had changed her mind and felt that:

When I moved to Cape Town I was like this, I don't like it here and I think now that I've read the book maybe it might be nice.

The realisation that life in their old environment does not alter significantly during their absence became evident. Peter's thoughts towards the end of the novel are as follows:

So, we're going back, I thought. Back to The Big Apple. Back to our apartment. Back to Jimmy Fargo and Sheila Tubman and my rock in the park. Back to walking Turtle and back to the Pooper-Scooper. But it's worth it. It's all worth it. (Blume, 1980:158 – 159).

DdS wrote:

I moved to America for one year and came back and everyone still recognised me.

The novel dealt with the theme of transferring from a familiar old environment to an unfamiliar, strange environment and many participants connected to this notion.

4.2.1.6 Critical reader-responses

When analysing the data from the video interviews and the written journals, I became aware of the lenses through which the readers responded critically to the text. These lenses reflected the reader-response theory and were grouped into three conceptual categories: the awareness of how reading stimulated their imagination, the connection between the ability to read and the development of a career (discussed further in Chapter 5), as well as making more meaning from the text by reading individually.

Three participants shared an awareness of how reading stimulated them creatively:

This was the video interview response:

NC	You could make up some games like that when you're done reading.
----	--

These were the reflective journal responses:

FJ	I read about thirty eight books this year. A book is like a movie but it's better cause it uses more adjectives it describes and once you get started it's like you're addicted you just have to finish the book.
KF	I love reading in my spare time. When you read it's like you're in a different world especially when you get lost in it.

Three participants connected the ability to read to the development of a career:

This was the video interview response:

JP	I think reading it important because when you're older if you don't read you don't know how to read and you won't get a job.
----	--

These were the reflective journal responses:

DdS	It is important to read to get a good career.
DN	Reading teaches you how to read and spell so when you grow up one day you will know how to say words properly and spell them. You can succeed in things like work.

GV was a child who came from an environment where reading was nurtured within the home. Therefore for him to make the most of this experience, it was his request to read the novel on his own at his desk:

I preferred reading it by myself because then I could read it at my own pace instead of sticking to the pace of the class and in comparison it's quite fast that's why I finished the book by myself.

I was well aware that this particular child was one of the only children who read the book in his own time, as this was not an instruction given to the class. It is important to mention that this particular individual chose reading above any other activities including sport and watching DVD's.

The context of the novel was culturally similar to the context of the participants and therefore the critical reader-response tensions were not within the contexts, but were centred primarily on the personal reactions to the reading process.

4.3 Summary

The author of the novel used in this research project embedded various cultural practices with which the nineteen participants in my class made personal connections. They identified with the characters in the novel and this provided me with rich data from which the five themes were analysed.

This chapter has presented and analysed both the verbal video interview responses, as well as the reflective journals which the participants in the study contributed. The five themes that emerged through this process have been summarised below:

- The characters in the novel and the participants all yearned to find their own authentic voice and did this through means of verbal communication, styles of clothing and emotional outbursts.

- The children were encouraged to discover which character in the novel they were able to relate to. Through this process they had to give a thorough explanation of their choices and were able to become more aware of their own identity as a result.

- The entertainment value of the novel proved to be the highlight for the Grade 4 children in the cohort. There was much humour in the text, which kept them interested and they enjoyed anticipating which amusing events were to follow.

- Due to the age and context of the children in the study, family dynamics with specific reference to siblings was a theme in the novel which they were able to relate to and comment on.

- A number of the participants could identify with the main character and his family relocating to another city. They had experienced the trauma of relocation, including the fear of the inability to develop new friendships and the grief of losing friendships.

The aim and objective of this research was to discover and analyse the critical reader responses of the Grade 4 children in the study. The questions which were asked allowed the participants the opportunity to not only offer their opinions on the novel, but to give a critical and comprehensive response to each question.

Although the novel was prescribed as part of the Grade 4 curriculum, the research which was conducted was not used for formative nor summative assessment purposes. Therefore I believe that this process enhanced the participants understanding of the reading process through careful reflection and analysis.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to discover and explore the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to a novel, *Superfudge*, written by Judy Blume (1980).

In the present research there was one research question. Chapter 5 attempts to discuss the research question in light of the presented evidence and results, as well as further insights that emerged from the study. Finally, I offer conclusions and make recommendations for future research in this field.

5.2 Discussion

In Chapter 4 the significant findings and results of this research were introduced, presented and discussed in detail. Subsequent insights, pertaining to Rosenblatt's (2004:1383) reader-response theory that have not been discussed in Chapter 4, but are pertinent to and extend the depth of this study, are further discussed in relation to the theoretical frames and relevant literature debated in Chapter 2. There are seven further insights: 1. the link between reading and building vocabulary; 2. the role gender plays on reading; 3. scaffolding and mediation in the classroom; 4. the correlation between my research and the curriculum; 5. the timing of my research; 6. norms and standards and 7. the non-assessment purposes of reading the chosen novel.

5.2.1 The link between reading and building vocabulary

The table below shows that five of the participants related their ability to read to the building of vocabulary. The children were not prompted to comment on the importance of reading for vocabulary development. The children were asked why

they felt that reading was important, or why they may have felt that it was not. These were five of the responses.

These were the video interview responses:

SBa	Reading is important because you learn some creativity and you learn bigger words.
NC	Then you could learn some new words.
FJ	Reading is important because it really helps with your vocabulary and it's good for your imagination.

These were the reflective journal responses:

MG	To me reading is very important. You learn new words.
KB	Reading is not very important to me because I already know how to say a lot of words.

Although four of these responses indicated a positive attitude towards reading, KB felt that he did not need to extend his vocabulary through means of reading.

Lane and Wright (2007:668) comment that there is ample evidence of the benefits of reading aloud to children. Their research demonstrated that reading aloud can increase their vocabulary. Allen (2006:16) agrees, stating that upon examining what is known regarding teaching vocabulary, we already know many things: those who know more words are better readers and increasing the volume of reading helps children learn new words. Knowing a word means more than simply knowing a definition and word learning is often based on background knowledge of the concept. Rosenblatt (2004:1367) stated that language is that part, or set of features, of the public system that has been internalised through a person's experiences with words in life situations. The children's comments appear to support Allen's (2006:16) claim that, noting that increasing the amount of time we spend reading to children and the amount of time they spend reading independently, will increase their receptive and expressive vocabularies.

In order for children to build vocabulary through exposure to a text, they need to understand the words within a context, resulting in engagement with it. Cambourne (2004:8) expands on this notion when he states that, engaging with what is being demonstrated, for example through means of reading a novel to children, adds further educational value to their lives.

5.2.2 The role gender plays on reading

According to Edwards (2002:1), girls and boys differ dramatically at this stage (Grade 4, aged between 9 and 10 years old) of their lives. He suggests that girls are better at language development and boys are more aggressive and have stronger spatial skills.

In my research, the question 'What is the difference between reading a book and watching a movie?' was posed to the children. Although their responses were discussed in Chapter 4, there is no mention of gender differences within the discussion. However here, in Chapter 5, where I interpret the findings, I feel that it is important to distinguish between the responses of the two genders, in order to ascertain the role that gender plays on reading, and children's attitudes towards reading. Rosenblatt (2004:1367) explains that each person, male or female, comes to a linguistic transaction with an individual history, depending on a number of factors, including their gender. Four of the participants commented that they preferred watching movies to reading and of these four, three were boys.

Many boys today are 'struggling' readers, which accounts for their reluctance to read. If they find reading difficult, they are not enjoying it. If they are not enjoying reading, they are avoiding it. Leonard (2001:1) continues, asking the questions: What do they want? What can we offer boys that will encourage them to take that drink of literary water? They want action, power and comedy. They want fast-paced books that are easy to read. For many boys reality is not fun, not comedic and not easy. They are pressurised to grow up quickly. They need to be given something that they want to read. They need to read books that are not patronising or childish. They need to start

at a place where they are comfortable and can gain experience and confidence without feeling humiliated. One of the boys in my study commented that what he appreciated about being read to, was the fact that I, as the teacher, read it at a fast pace, since he was a slow reader Leonard (2009:1).

The debate about the role of gender differences, with increasing interest in the underachievement of boys with low motivation, has escalated over the past decade (Marinak and Gambrell, 2010:129). In the United States, an analysis of the results of the 1992 – 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that girls in Grades 4, 8 and 12 consistently performed better than their male counterparts in reading achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). When exploring the reasons for this, Marinak and Gambrell (2010:129) suggest that girls seem to learn to read earlier, comprehend narrative and expository texts better and have higher estimates of their reading abilities than boys. In addition to this, girls are less likely to declare themselves as non-readers and value reading as an activity more than boys. The importance of investigating these differences is becoming increasingly clear.

Marinak and Gambrell's notions (2010:129) reiterate those of Erikson (in Boeree, 2006:4) who previously stated that that a sense of accomplishment and a positive self-esteem result in the learners gaining independence and that proficiency in language, including reading, will assist learners to reach independence. However, it is interesting to note that Erikson makes no distinction between boys and girls, implying that the manner in which they are mediated plays a bigger role than their gender does.

5.2.3 Scaffolding and mediation

Due to the fact that the novel was read aloud to the children within the study, and it was discussed as a class throughout, much scaffolding and mediation occurred during the research process. As Petty (2009:84) suggests, open-ended questions can stimulate children's critical thinking and cognitive competence. The questions

posed to the children encouraged them to make their own meaning through individual interpretation of the text. In the same manner, they were developing and expressing their critical reader-responses.

Courtney, King and Pedro (2006:36) explain that through the exploration of different teaching practices and observing how children were more successful with specific strategy instruction, many processes emerged. The following processes which became evident from their research were relevant to this research project:

- **Teacher modelling:** demonstrating what the strategy application would entail. The novel was read aloud to the children, encouraging them to engage with the text.
- **Teacher making her/his thinking visible:** as the novel progressed, I explained challenging words or concepts to the class. I asked the children whether they were able to relate to certain events that occurred in the story.
- **Guided practice:** practice and discussion with the whole group – collaborative talk. Within each reading session there were many discussions that emerged. Some of these discussions were spontaneous, while others were planned.
- **Practising the strategy with a buddy, small group or independently:** reflective journaling was explained to the children. They were allowed the opportunity to complete their answers to the various interview questions individually, at their own pace, within their journals.
- **Scaffolding by the teacher:** raising individual strategy use to conscious awareness through engaging, questioning, prompting, modelling, explaining, challenging, reflecting, clarifying and leading. This entire research process entailed engagement, questioning, prompting, modelling, explaining, challenging, reflecting, clarifying and leading. It was through these actions that the research question was answered.

- Teacher constantly providing independent practice and creating an atmosphere of self-reflection and self-regulation: the children were required to express their critical responses to the chosen novel. They were given the opportunity to reflect critically on the novel, as well as themselves.

The above mentioned process closely reflects the manner in which my research was conducted. There was constant scaffolding and mediation. As Feuerstein (1991:3) suggests, mediation can be defined as the interaction between the human being and its social environment via a human mediator. In the case of my research the children were interacting with one another, as well as the chosen novel, *Superfudge* (Blume, 1980) and the characters within it, whilst I was the human mediator. Feuerstein agrees with Courtney et al (2006:30), when they state that the intention to mediate an event as a personal emotional experience requires the environment to be conducive to mediation, presenting it in a way that allows a high level of cognitive, self-reflective, insightful processing. The reciprocity of the relationship between mediator and mediatee is manifested by the mutual questioning and answering which shape the interactions (Feuerstein, 1991:17-19). For Vygotsky (in Olivier, 2010:22-23), developing language and the articulation of ideas were central to the development and learning of an individual. According to him, scaffolding would not occur unless mediation had taken place.

5.2.4 Timing of year for my research

Cambourne's (2004:28) study of social constructivism suggests in his third principle of engagement, that children engage in texts when they are free from anxiety. During this study the participants were repeatedly reminded that they could simply listen to the chosen novel being read aloud to them, after they had packed their bags, ready to go home.

It is important to bear in mind that the research was conducted at the end of the academic year. According to Cambourne (2004:28), children will only respond to people who are significant to them and are more likely to engage with the demonstrations provided by an individual who they like and respect. Due to this, the teacher gives appropriate demonstrations that support literacy development and acquisition. As I had built a relationship with the children in my class over the eleven months prior to my research being conducted, they not only responded to and engaged with the interviewing process, but they were willing to support the research for which I was conducting the interviews. This would not have been the case if I were not important to them and if they did not have respect for me. Their participation was valuable because the interviews occurred later on in their Grade 4 year. Ultimately the data that I collected was rich due to this.

The research was conducted towards the end of the academic year. The children would write examinations in the morning and we would read and reflect on the chosen novel at the end of each school day. This was done intentionally, in order to create a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, by removing academic pressure.

It was important for the research environment to be anxiety-free. Rosenblatt (2004:1376) suggests that children respond when there is an ambience of acceptance and confirmation of ideas and attitudes brought to reading. The teaching of reading and writing at any developmental level should have as its first concern the creation of environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own experiences to make meanings. During this research study, the children were in their usual classroom, where they spent the majority of their school day. The atmosphere was relaxed and the ideas and opinions of the the children were welcomed. This reinforced Cambourne's (2004:28) notion that engagement with whatever is being demonstrated will not lead to pain, humiliation, denigration and the implication that potential learners must feel safe to add their contributions or to participate in whichever activities they are invited to join.

As Cambourne suggests, the children 'felt safe' when following the instruction to write their thoughts down.

5.2.5 Correlation between my research and the NCS

Although my research was not for assessment purposes within the classroom, there was a strong correlation between the analysis of the results and the NCS (2002). This correlation is discussed below:

The children were read to, which meant that they simply had to listen to the text as it was being read by a competent reader. As Learning Outcome 1 – listening – suggests, they were able to listen for information and enjoyment and respond appropriately and critically. Although the children were not formally assessed, many of the assessment standards of this outcome were evident throughout the process, as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 A correlation between the reading process for data collection and Learning Outcome 1

The reader-response process	LO 1: Listening
	The children were able to:
The children were read to by a competent reader	enjoy listening to different kinds of texts and respond appropriately.
The children were asked questions regarding how they related to the text.	discuss the central idea and specific details of the text while relating them to their own experiences.
The children were instructed to answer questions in writing.	carry out instructions.
The children sat quietly, listening to the verbal responses of their peers.	listen actively in conversation and discussion showing respect for and sensitivity to the feelings of others and appreciating other points of view.
Formal and informal discussions regarding the novel were held in class.	discuss social, moral and cultural values, attitudes and assumptions in oral texts

During class discussions, as well as the video interviews, children were asked questions which they could answer verbally. Although their initial verbal responses during class discussions were not assessed, their interview responses were recorded for the purpose of this research. These recorded responses pertain to Learning Outcome 2 – speaking – when the child will be able to communicate confidently and effectively in spoken language. The correlation between speaking opportunities provided in the classroom and Learning Outcome 2 are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The correlation between the reading process for data collection and Learning Outcome 2

The reader-response process for data collection	LO 2: Speaking
	The children were able to:
<p>The children were given the opportunity to discuss and respond to questions regarding how their personal experiences related to the text, <i>Superfudge</i> (Blume, 1980).</p>	<p>communicate experiences, ideas and information in different contexts for different audiences and purposes:</p> <p>using language with ease for interpersonal communication;</p> <p>sharing ideas and offering opinions on familiar topics from personal experience;</p> <p>recalling and describing a set of actions or events;</p> <p>asking and responding to questions;</p> <p>discussing and comparing own and others' ideas and opinions.</p>
<p>Since this discussion happened at the end of the year, ground rules for class interactions were firmly in place. These included:</p> <p>Not interrupting one another, listening to others while they spoke,</p>	<p>use interaction skills and strategies for working in groups:</p> <p>take turns;</p> <p>stay on topic;</p>

respecting the opinions of others, not distracting one another.	ask relevant questions; maintain discussion; respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect; give balanced and constructive feedback; show respect for others in group.
The children were asked to respond verbally to the questions asked during the video interviews. They were asked to not to speak with their hands in front of their mouths, to look at the camera, and not to fidget.	use appropriate body language and presentation skills: make eye contact and limit fidgeting; use appropriate gestures and facial expressions. use appropriate words and structures for different purposes and audiences.

The reflective journaling allowed the children to express themselves in writing. They were encouraged to respond honestly and not to concern themselves with correct spelling or grammar. Rosenblatt (2004:1379) states that the writing process must be seen as always embodying both personal and social, or individual and environmental, factors. To understand whether the learners had engaged with the text, they responded openly and freely on paper, expressing their opinions and sharing the manner in which they made meaning of the text. During the reflective process, the children 'felt safe' when writing their thoughts down (Cambourne 2004:28). The curriculum states that within Learning Outcome 3 – writing – children will be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes. The correlation between writing opportunities provided in the classroom and Learning Outcome 3 are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The correlation between the reading and writing process for data collection and Learning Outcome 3

The reader-response and writing process for data collection	LO 3: Writing
	The children were able to:
The children were given the opportunity to write their responses in their reflective journals, knowing that I would use it for my research.	<p>write different kinds of texts for different purposes and audiences:</p> <p>write for personal, exploratory, playful, imaginative and creative purpose;</p> <p>write informational texts expressing ideas clearly for different audiences.</p>
The children were instructed to answer questions in writing, using appropriate grammatical structures.	<p>applies knowledge of language at various levels: carry out instructions:</p> <p>select and use a wide variety of words drawn from language experience, activities, literature, and oral language of classmates and others;</p> <p>sentence level:</p> <p>extend sentences by adding adjectives, adverbs, qualifying phrases and clauses;</p> <p>use topic and supporting sentences to develop a coherent paragraph.</p>

The main focus of the research was to discover how the children made meaning of the text, through extracting their critical reader-responses. Therefore, Learning Outcome 5 – thinking and reasoning – correlated closely to the research question, that children would be able to use language to think and reason, as well as to access, process and use information for learning. The correlation between reflection

opportunities for data collection provided in the classroom and Learning Outcome 5 are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The correlation between reflection opportunities for data collection and Learning Outcome 5

The reading and reflection process for data collection	LO 5: Thinking and reasoning
	The children were able to:
The children were given opportunities to debate why they enjoyed or did not enjoy the chosen novel. These discussions encouraged independent thinking and reasoning skills.	<p>use language to think and reason:</p> <p>identify alternative options and why and how they are different;</p> <p>infer meanings that are not obviously stated and can explain how the meaning was conveyed.</p>
Throughout the reading of the chosen novel, the children were able to respond honestly and freely to the novel. They were encouraged to evaluate and examine the content and relate it to their lives. Debating the novel developed logical, sequential thinking and expressive language.	<p>process information:</p> <p>select relevant ideas;</p> <p>pick out examples from explanations;</p> <p>put information in the right order;</p> <p>make judgements based on the information and draw conclusions.</p>

5.2.6 Norms and standards

According to the Norms and Standards for Educators (Government Gazette, 2000:13 – 14), there are seven roles that should be performed by teachers. These roles are: learning mediator, interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, leader, administrator and manager, scholar, researcher and lifelong learner, community, citizenship and pastoral role, assessor and learning

area/subject/discipline/phase specialist. In this study, I focused on the role of scholar, researcher and lifelong learner.

This role is described (2000:13) as the teacher achieving ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth through pursuing reflective study and research in their learning area, in broader professional and educational matters, and in other related fields. One of the practical competences for this role is reading academic and professional texts critically (2000:20). For any higher learning, critical reading is mandatory. During this research I reflected on the critical responses to literature, which is a reflexive competence within this role.

As a teacher and researcher I have significantly benefited from this study. As the norms and standards suggest, I have exercised my role as scholar, researcher and lifelong learner in the classroom. It was a privilege for me to gain access into the critical reader-responses of the children within this research study.

5.2.7 Non-assessment purposes of this study

Erikson, (in Boeree, 2006:4) would concur with both Cambourne (2004:28) and Vygotsky (in Olivier, 1978) stating that completing and discussing a novel gives children a sense of industry, a feeling of competence and mastery. To achieve this they had to engage with the interactive reading and reflective process, thereby avoiding a sense of failure, inferiority or poor self-esteem. Rosenblatt (2004:1372) suggests that the situation and purpose of the reader affects the extent to which public and private meanings are made. The fact that this study was not intended for academic purposes, allowed the children the freedom to engage with the text, with no pressure to read aloud or complete a written or verbal task based on it.

The chosen novel was read aloud to the children, a practice which, according to Krashen (2003:50), has been considered by many researchers to be the single most

important activity in developing a child's literacy. It has been repeatedly shown that higher adult interactions with students lead to enhanced student literacy.

MacDonell (2004:31) states that children need to take pleasure in reading if they are going to take an interest in reading without being forced to do so as an academic practice. MacDonell further notes that reading aloud to children is an ideal stimulation for their minds because it involves visual, auditory, and interactive attention processes in a pleasurable context.

The reflective journaling provided me with a clear indication of how much the children had internalised during the study of the novel. Another manner in which comprehension was evident, was in the children's ability to apply their knowledge of the novel to the questions which were posed. Some of them were unable to give substantial answers to the various questions, nor were they able to express their opinions in a mature and eloquent fashion. One of the questions which was asked during the reflective journaling process was, "Do you and your family discuss books with one another?" The majority of the children said that this was not something that was done in their homes. Those children, who said that it was indeed an activity that occurred frequently in their homes, were able to engage more with the text, resulting in more expressive and detailed responses.

The particular novel studied during this research project exposed the children to both another social context, enabling them to learn about a culture other than their own, as well as reflective practice.

5.3 Validity

In planning an inquiry a researcher is inevitably asked about how validity, reliability and generalisability will be built into the design (Henning, 2004:146). Kvale states (in Henning, 2004:148) that validation depends on good craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking and interpreting the findings. Kvale explains that craftsmanship means that there needs to be precision throughout the

research process, from design to presenting the findings. This means that the researcher will assure the quality of the data throughout and “file” evidence. To validate means to check for bias, neglect and lack of precision, to question and to theorise throughout the process.

Henning (2004:147) explains that, in psychometric terms, validity asks the question whether what is being measured is meant to be measured. In qualitative research this refers to the question of whether, by using certain methods, the researcher is investigating what he or she says they are investigating. Henning continues, suggesting that the issue of correspondence must be looked at – whether the research findings correspond with reality. Kvale (2002:300) mentions the trinity of reliability, validity and generalisation. He refers to this as the “scientific holy trinity”. Henning (2004:151) argues that validity, if based on the trio of ideas – *craftsmanship* with precision, care and accountability, *open communication* throughout the research process and immersing the process in the conversations of the discourse community – as well as a good dose of *pragmatic, ethical validity*, may help the research community to judge the value of an inquiry.

Patton (in Golafshani, 2003:601), states that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study.

To understand the meaning of reliability and validity, it is necessary to present the various definitions of reliability and validity given by many qualitative researchers from different perspectives (Golafshani, 2003:600 – 601). He continues, stating that to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial.

Validity is described by Cohen et al (2008:133), as being a requirement for both quantitative, as well as qualitative/naturalistic research. Earlier versions of validity were based on the view that it was essentially a demonstration that a particular

instrument in fact measures what it professes to measure; more recent validity has taken many forms. Winter (in Cohen et al, 2008:133) claims that in qualitative data validity is addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher. According to Cohen et al (2008:133), it is impossible for research to be 100 percent valid and that this notion is the optimism of perfection. In qualitative data the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives together contribute to a degree of bias. Since validity is seen as a matter of degree rather than an absolute state, one must strive to minimise invalidity and maximise validity.

In light of the above statements, the various types of evidence of validity will be discussed in the context of the current research study. In this section I shall discuss those that pertain to my research. The discussion that follows describes the multiple sources of validity that have occurred throughout the research process as they have been discussed in previous chapters. Although I have only given one example to determine each type of validity, it is important to see this study as an integrated whole unit where there are multiple examples.

5.3.1 Internal validity

Internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data, which a piece of research provided, can actually be sustained by the data. In some degree this concerns accuracy, which can be applied to quantitative and qualitative research. The findings must accurately describe the phenomena being researched (Cohen et al, 2008:135). The data used within this research are the critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to a novel read to them. Their responses were recorded on film, as well as in writing.

Hammersley (1992:71) suggests that internal validity for qualitative data requires attention to plausibility and credibility, the kinds of amounts of evidence required,

clarity on the kinds of claim made from the research. This research contains ample evidence that the research question is credible, as seen in Chapter 4. The critical reader-responses of the children were not manipulated, but recorded as stated in the interviews and journals. This data reflected the research question.

5.3.2 Interpretive validity

This concept refers to the ability of the research to catch the meaning, interpretations, terms, intentions that situations and events have for the participants themselves, in their terms, state Cohen et al (2008:135). Johnson (1997:282) describes interpretive validity as referring to the accuracy in reporting the facts and requiring the development of a window into the minds of the people being studied. It is accurately portraying the meaning attached by participants to what is being studied by the researcher. Interpretive validity is being obtained to the degree that the participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences are accurately understood and reported by the qualitative researcher. The main purpose of this research project was to discover the manner in which the participants made meaning of and interpreted the text which was presented to them.

5.3.3 Theoretical validity

Johnson (1997:282) suggests that theoretical validity is obtained to the degree that a theory or theoretical explanation developed from a research study, fits the data and is, therefore, credible and defensible. This research project is largely based on socio-cultural theories, as well as Rosenblatt's (1986) critical reader-response theory. She presented a theoretical model that covers all modes of reading. Cohen et al (2008:135) describe this type of validity as being the theoretical constructions that the researcher brings to the research. The theory which forms part of this research project, serves as an explanation. Theoretical validity is the extent to which the research explains phenomena.

5.3.4 Descriptive validity

Descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the account as reported by the researchers. The key questions addressed in descriptive validity are: Did what was reported as taking place in the group being studied really happen? Did the researchers accurately report what they saw and heard? In other words, descriptive validity refers to accuracy in reporting descriptive information (for example, descriptions of events, objects, behaviours, people, settings, times and places). This form of validity is important because description is a major objective in nearly all qualitative research (Johnson, 1997:283). This research projects presents a clear description of the process, as well as the findings thereof. There is evidence to validate the responses of the participants within the study, as well as the manner in which they responded to each question – verbally, in writing or both. The thematic analysis of the data ensured that the responses were recorded accurately.

5.3.5 Generalisability

Cohen et al (2008:135) explain that generalisability refers to the view that the theory generated may be useful in understanding other similar situations. This refers to generalising within specific groups or communities, situations or circumstances and beyond, to specific outsider communities, situations or circumstances (external validity). The research that was conducted for this study can be repeated within another context, at a different school, within a different age group and even in a different country.

5.3.6 Cultural validity

The intention of this type of validity is to shape research so that it is appropriate to the culture of the researched (Cohen et al, 2008:139). Cultural validity is defined as 'the degree to which a study is appropriate to the cultural setting where research is to be carried out' (Cohen et al, 2008:139). It applies at all stages of research, and affects its planning, implementation and dissemination, according to Morgan (in

Cohen et al, 2008:139). It was important within this research project, to select a novel that was suitable for the Grade 4 group within an affluent school. The children were able to relate to the events within the story, because the main character not only shared their age, but also came from a seemingly similar background as the participants.

5.3.7 Construct validity

This type of validity is different to the other types of validity which deal in actualities (Cohen et al, 2008:138). This validity agreement is sought on functional forms of a concept, clarifying what we mean when we use this construct. To establish construct validity, the researcher needs to ensure that his or her construction agrees with other constructions of the underlying issue. In this research project the theoretical framework, particularly Rosenblatt's (1986) critical reader-response theory, was the underlying issue.

Cohen et al (2008:138) continue, explaining that construct validity can be obtained through correlations with other measures of the issue, or by rooting the researcher's construction in a wide ranging literature search which teases out the meaning of a particular construct and its constituent elements. Extensive examination of literature was explored in order to enable the construct validity of this research project.

5.4 Recommendations

I would like to conclude by making two types of recommendations. Firstly, I would like to make recommendations for fellow researchers who would like to replicate my research. Secondly, I would like to recommend how to construct a classroom environment that is conducive to critical reading.

5.4.1 Recommendations for replication of this research

If a study such as this is to be conducted in the future, there should be a second individual involved in the filming process. The researcher should have the opportunity to ask the interview questions while being filmed, in order to make the filming, as well as the transcribing process, easier. There should be a second person present to allow the researcher to divide the cohort into smaller focus-groups for in-depth discussions.

For this type of research, the sample size of nineteen Grade 4 children is ideal. There should be no more than twenty in the cohort as the small sample size allowed the children to have an opportunity to volunteer their verbal responses with a minimal number interruptions one can expect from a large group of children. Twenty or fewer children are easy to manage in the classroom context, as well as when collecting data.

The questions which were asked during the filming process should be identical to those posed during the reflective journalling process. This duplication will ensure consistent data and the difference between the two methods of data gathering will be more obvious.

The interviewing process must be discussed in detail with the children. The questions must be written on the board in order for them to be reminded of what is being asked. The questions must be discussed with the children prior to the interviews, to prevent misunderstanding or confusion. This will ensure that they are aware of what is expected from them and that the questions are understood.

The questions must be written on the board for the children when they are writing their responses in their reflective journals. They must be afforded the opportunity to query the meaning of the questions.

The reading of the chosen novel should be completed before the interviewing process takes place. Although the novel should be discussed on a continual basis, the formal video and reflective responses must only occur once the novel has been completed.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the construction of a classroom environment conducive to critical reading

Judy Blume's novels, '*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*' (1979) and *Superfudge* (1980) would be appropriate for the child-audience's development. These novels are well suited to Grade 4 children. There is a combination of humorous events which they find entertaining, they are exposed to a social context they are unfamiliar with and there are real-life situations which are relevant to them. The main characters in these novels are of a similar age to the children in Grade 4, making it likely that the children will understand the context of the characters within the story.

Superfudge (Blume, 1980) is particularly appropriate to be read and discussed at the end of the academic year when the children are more likely to engage with the text and participate in the informal discussions. There is no academic pressure because the children's examinations are completed in the first half of the school day and the reading of the novel can serve as a 'treat' at the end of each day. In this research study, the reading of the novel was for research purposes, therefore, there was no academic assessment related to the novel.

To develop a classroom environment where the children are free to respond critically to the text, it is important to set ground rules that promote mutual respect and tolerance. Hence it is recommended that conducting critical reflection activities should occur once these ground rules are firmly in place. During the course of the year, the teacher has ample opportunities to earn the respect of the children, creating a classroom environment that has a balance of consideration, discipline and fun.

5.5 Conclusions

I acknowledge that this is one small study that cannot be generalised, but it aligns well with several of the research findings referred to in Chapter 2.

In conclusion this process of critical reader-response and socio-cultural theory empowered the children to develop critical thinking skills and habits that underlie effective reading. These skills correlate with the outcomes described in the NCS document and can be seen on Tables 1 – 4 on pages 84 – 88.

On many levels this research project was a privilege and an honour to be involved with. As a teacher and a researcher I discovered the importance of allowing children the opportunity to respond critically to literature in both formal and informal environments. The use of video interviews and written journal responses provided a depth of reflection and insight which was both enlightening and informative. The emphases were on encouraging children to make their own meaning of the text, being confident in their interpretations and being able to express them verbally and in writing.

Children are often fearful of reading aloud and they avoid reading if they are 'struggling readers'. Teachers must not underestimate the value of reading aloud to children, regardless of their age.

Children need to develop and maintain a love for reading, while making meaning of and responding critically to texts. Thus, each reader within a reading community, including adults and young people, responds to literature for young people in different ways at different times. Adults often have a very different set of life experiences to draw on when reading a text, giving them different insights into that text.

Reader-response theorists, such as Rosenblatt, also confirm the dialogic discussion in which an exposure to diverse points of view and a reflection on a personal

interpretation of text is a key for readers to make literary transactions during the classroom discussion.

Research needs to be sufficiently complex, varied, and interlocking to do justice to the fact that reading is at once an intensely individual and an intensely social activity, an activity that from the earliest years involves the whole spectrum of ways of looking at the world (Rosenblatt, 2004:1396).

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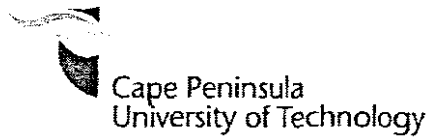
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Appendix 1

Letter from principal granting permission



15 October 2008

Dear Mr Keats,

Thank you for the interest and support in my Master's research study. The focus of my research is the reader response of Grade 4 pupils to a novel written by Judy Blume.

During October this year, I will be conducting focus-group, as well as individual interviews with the pupils in my class. The purpose of these interviews is to establish the value of this novel within the Grade 4 syllabus as well as how the individual participants interpret and respond to the texts. In addition to the interviews, the pupils will also write journals about their experience of the novel, where they will be able to reflect honestly on it. Participants will not lose learning time as the interviews and journal entries will form part of their academic as well as my research purposes.

The pupils have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time and I will ensure that no undue stress will be caused during the data collection. The participants will be under no financial obligation or commitment as this is part of their syllabus and the novels have been purchased prior to the research.

All the information that is shared in the classroom will be treated confidentially and this will be emphasised. The participants as well as their parents will receive a letter to request their consent.

I request permission from you to conduct this research in my class and with my Grade 4 learners. On completion of the thesis I will share the results with you and the staff.

Yours sincerely



Monique Smith

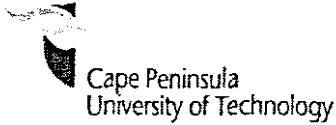
I hereby give permission for Miss Monique Smith to conduct research for her Master's Thesis with Grade 4 pupils at Reddam House Atlantic Seaboard during the month of November 2008. I understand that all the information that is shared in the classroom will be treated confidentially and this has been emphasised to the pupils as well as their parents.



Graham Keats

Appendix 2

Consent form to parents



27 October 2008

Dear Grade 4 Parents,

As some of you know I am currently doing my Masters Degree in Education. The focus of my research is the reader response of Grade 4 pupils to a Judy Blume novel, "Superfudge".

During October/November this year, I will be conducting focus-group, as well as individual interviews with the pupils in my class. The purpose of these interviews is to establish the value of the novel within the Grade 4 syllabus as well as how the individual participants interpret and respond to the text. In addition to the interviews, the pupils will also write journals about their experience of the novel, where they will be able to reflect honestly on it. All interviews will be recorded for analysis. Participants will not lose teaching nor learning time as the interviews and journal entries will form part of their academic as well as my research purposes.

The pupils have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time and I will ensure that no undue stress will be caused during the data collection. The participants will be under no financial obligation or commitment as this is part of their syllabus and the novels have been purchased prior to the research.

All the information that is shared in the classroom will be treated confidentially and this will be emphasised.

I request permission from you to conduct this research with your child as outlined above. On completion of the thesis I will share the results with you and your child. Kindly complete the reply slip below.

Yours sincerely,


 Monique Smith

X.....

REPLY SLIP

I _____ hereby give permission for my child.

_____ to be part of the educational research outlined above.

Parent Signature

Date

Appendix 3

Video interview and reflective journalling questions

The interview questions for the video interviews and reflective journals:

1. What was your favourite part of the story? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Who was your favourite character? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Which character did you relate to the best? Give a reason for your answer.
4. Do you prefer reading on your own or do you prefer being read to? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Do you think reading is important? Give a reason for your answer.
6. Do you think that *Superfudge* is a suitable book for Grade 4? Give a reason for your answer.
7. What have you learnt from this book?
8. How was the book similar to your own life?
9. How did the book make you feel? Explain your answer.
10. Do you enjoy reading? Give a reason for your answer.
11. What did you appreciate most about *Superfudge* (Blume:1980)? Give a reason for your answer.