READING CHILDREN: HOW CHILDREN AND SELECTORS PERCEIVE AND CONSTRUCT THE READING OF FICTION IN TWO SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

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This is my own original and unaided work that has not been submitted to any other institution before for assessment purposes. All sources, references and other assistance have been acknowledged.

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This thesis would not have possible without the help and co-operation of a number of people. I must first thank the principals, staff and pupils at Walter Teka Higher Primary School and Good Hope Seminary Junior school. I am specially grateful to all the children who came forward so eagerly to talk about their reading. I owe thanks, too, to Nombesuthu Mfenyana, Jenny Skibbe, and Ms Sterley, who organised meetings and supplied information with such willingness, and to Barbara Coombe of READ who set up meetings and let me accompany her on her rounds to schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation was to uncover what went into the provision of books of fiction to schools; to examine the construction of readers by book selectors; to find out how children saw themselves as readers and what their own feelings were about reading; and to speculate on the extent to which policies are changing or can be changed.

In order to do this I have looked at the situation in two schools with very different histories in the Western Cape. I have tried to establish what the conditions were that created their situation. Through speaking to various book selectors and to children to discover their responses to books, I have gathered material to comment on their perceptions. The schools were chosen as representative of two systems. The children are readers who speak for themselves and, to a certain extent, for their schoolmates.

A basic assumption of this work is that both texts and readers are socially constructed. A second assumption, drawing on Wolfgang Iser, is that both texts and readers are active in the reading process. I am, therefore, interested in the "two basic thrusts" in recent research into children's literature identified by Joel Taxel (1989:32). The first is textual and assumes that meaning is determined by the text itself; the second is reader focused. Taxel contends that they can both be accommodated within a sociological perspective, as "literature constitutes an important source of children's knowledge about and orientation to the social world" (1989:33).

Another influence on this work is what Charles Sarland has written about young people's reading in terms of culture and response. He has built on the research of Donald Fry, and recorded the voices of children responding to the voices of authors in order to understand the social meaning of what they say. In trying to set a frame within which to study the reading behaviour of children, I have drawn on Margaret Meek's work dealing with children's reading and the meaning of literacy.

Ultimately, this thesis is a comment on and an analysis of the state of affairs at two schools at a time when the educational system is in a state of flux. It is an

attempt to examine the dominant views of book selectors and to discuss them in relation to those of the children for whom they choose books.

The first two chapters are about reading and book selection. Chapter 1 discusses how reading is currently understood by theorists, and what factors facilitate or restrict access to it. Chapter 2 raises some of the issues and concerns that influence book selectors generally.

This is followed by a discussion of findings in the two schools and an attempt to link the findings to issues raised in the first two chapters. Chapter 3 is a description of the research method. Essentially this was a series of interviews with children and selectors. A situation was also created whereby groups of children could choose books for their classmates and explain why certain choices were made. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with book selectors and children respectively. The people concerned and the motivation for their choices are described and contextualised. In the conclusion, findings are summed up and new directions suggested.

Many of the concerns raised are not new. They are part of recurring debates around children's books and their selection. The aim of the thesis is to examine where the emphasis is falling at present in two South African schools and to think about possible future trends.

CHAPTER I
READING

At its most basic reading is making sense of texts. This description can be broadened to include defining what reading matter is; how and why people read; and the implications of learning to read.

Meek says that what we mean by reading changes from one generation to the next. This is because, "[a]s language changes, as societies change, so what counts as literacy also changes" (1991:36). She points out that the very word literacy has taken on different meanings at different times. She proposes that we return to an older, wider definition that includes all kinds of reading--a proposal that will be taken up in this thesis, where the terms "reading" and "literacy" will sometimes be used interchangeably. She says:

> Until the middle of the eighteenth century, literature and literacy meant almost the same thing. Literature was the books that a literate person read. Now we keep the words apart and give them specialised meanings; literacy for social usefulness, literature for certain selected texts that, by tradition or personal taste, are considered to be well-written and that are to be read, somehow, differently. I want to bring the two words back together again so that literature does not depend for its definition on private opinions of its worth but is simply the writing that people do, while literacy is about reading and writing texts of all kinds and the entitlement of all (1991:28).

In a later article Meek suggests that the time has come to redescribe reading, partly to expand our understanding of what we mean by reading matter, and partly to rework some of the taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to be literate, who defines literacy and who legitimates the learning of it. She goes on to say,"If we are to redescribe reading, we have to begin with how people do it, and what they do it for" (1992:231).

In trying to define reading I will touch on a number of aspects of reading. The main argument of this chapter is that reading and culture are linked. It will start with a definition of what reading matter is, go on to refer to theories of how people

read, and then expand on some of the ways in which reading is socially constructed. The focus of the thesis in later chapters will be on the books that children read and "what they do it for."

Reading matter

A broad conception of what constitutes reading matter would encompass all print in the public domain and all media that entertain, inform and impart cultural knowledge. Meek includes television, computers, children's writing and contemporary journalism in her list of "new literacies" (1991:207). Cary Bazalgette includes all the visual media--like photographs, film, television--and, drawing on Barthes, argues that the whole universe of signs is organised into codes and conventions that are learnt in a way that is analogous to reading written texts. She says that there is "no real rationale for separating media into different categories and teaching them differently, except insofar as their technologies demand it" (1988:222).

An extended definition of reading matter means that competent readers are those who are able to interpret the new literacies. They are usually members of the dominant culture. The people Meek refers to as "powerful literates" are those who "read a lot and know their way around the world of print" (1991:33); and

> those who have a kind of confident knowing that they will be able to cope with written language, however unfamiliar, by discovering how it works. They understand the constructedness of texts, and know that behind any writing there is a writer looking for readers (1991:162).

Such people may not be fiction readers, as most of the children in this study are. However, it is often in the reading of stories that children first gain confidence as readers, so that is where the focus will lie.

What happens when people read

Reading itself is an interaction between text, however defined, and reader. The link between reading and culture can be seen in how this interaction develops. Iser sees it as taking place between different poles, variously termed the aesthetic and the artistic, or readers' psychology and authors' techniques, or the subjective readers' position and the objective text. A literary work achieves a "virtual position" somewhere between the two poles (1978:21). This means that a literary work will not have exactly the same meaning for everyone. It does not mean that a

text can mean anything at all--that it becomes a "form of uncontrolled subjectivism" (1978:23). Texts do provide commonly accepted or intersubjective meanings. But these meanings may lead to different subjective experiences and judgements.

The different responses come about because both readers and texts bring their own repertoires to the reading process, and these complement one another to varying degrees. The text comes with a repertoire which may include references to earlier works, to social or historical norms or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged. The reader brings a repertoire of knowledge and expectations based on previous reading and experiences. Both repertoires are transformed as writers write and readers read. What is written is changed from its original context by its removal into the book, by strategies which establish common ground between reader and text and strategies that present the familiar in a different light. Readers' expectations may be modified as the texts feed them with more information. To quote Iser again, "throughout the reading process there is a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories" (1978:111). What readers are given is a frame within which they can engage with what is said in different ways.

When children learn to read, the way in which they do it is influenced by the context in which it happens. On an individual level, children may be motivated both by what they see others doing and what they themselves get to read. Frank Smith says children "learn to read through reading" (1973:195). Meek says that texts teach what readers learn (1988). They learn how things work when reading different kinds of texts and gain confidence as they start to play with texts as well as simply to follow them. In a later work she suggests that reading should be seen in terms of "dialogue and desire" (1992:231). Failure or unwillingness to read occurs when it offers no dialogue and it is not seen as especially desirable. Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan say of children who resent reading that they experience it as an essentially passive procedure, a "mere recognition of letters, words and sentences that [remain] devoid of any deeper meaning" (1981:36).

The strategies readers use to interpret what they read are also linked to their context and experience. Examples are top-down and bottom up strategies. John Stephens says top-down strategies derive from the part of the repetoire that draws on previous knowledge and experience to interpret what is read. Bottom up reading involves the interpretation of letters, words, phrases and sentences. Stephens says the two strategies interact because, while there are always top-down factors present,

"interpretation of a written text must finally rest on its linguistic components" (1992:29). He suggests that inexperienced readers may rely more heavily on bottom up reading, concentrating, for example, more on story and missing theme, intentional absurdity and irony.

Reading against the text

It seems, then, that what readers derive from texts is dependent on repertoire and experience. But it is also influenced by what readers are prepared to take from texts and to what extent they go along with the ideology and subject positions offered by the author. All texts carry some kind of ideology, even if it is expressed as a seeming refusal to commitment. Stephens says:

> A narrative without an ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language (1992:8).

However, Umberto Eco says that readers respond to ideology in different ways. They may share the ideology of the writer and read along with it; they may challenge the author's value judgements and reveal what lies behind them; they may ignore the ideology and import their own "aberrant" reading which is different from the one envisaged by the sender; or they may make a text "say more than it apparently says" in a search for the author's ideological sub-codes (1981:22). Sarland, drawing on Eco, feels that children often read against the ideology of a text. He shows how children can produce a "counter-reading" of a text which is at odds with anything the author intended (1991:51). To understand how children do this he suggests that it may be necessary for a critical reader to take up Eco's last option and "interrogate the text in order to get it to reveal its underlying ideological contradictions" (1991:138).

How the ideology of a book is understood has implications in book selection, particularly when books are popular in spite of their apparent opposition to the interests of their readers. In this study I have attempted to find out from children and selectors something about the repertoires they bring to reading and their subjective understandings of what books are. These influence the choices they make when selecting books.

Reading as a social activity

Reading is both an individual and a social activity. To quote Meek again:

> Literacy has two beginnings: one, in the world, the other, in each person who learns to read and write (1991:13).

This section will look more closely at reading "in the world." It will consider how an individual choosing a book from a library shelf is engaging in a number of complex social interactions. She is interacting with society at large and with books which are culturally-laden artefacts. Her choice can be seen as an individual preference, but one that has arisen out of a particular social construction.

Crucial to any social construction of an activity like reading is the issue of power. Language is a repository of accumulated meaning and experience. As such, it is a powerful tool and its written form has traditionally been controlled by the powerful. However, there are different kinds of literacy and different attitudes to it. Brian Street (1991) and Shirley Brice Heath (1983) have shown what some of these different literacies are like and how people value literacy in different ways, often with different status associations. A paper by Clive Millar et al of the Department of Adult Education at UCT indicates that literacy is not a priority for illiterate and semi-literate people, who may have other more basic needs. They say:

> [L]iteracy has not occupied a significant position in the collective drive towards developmental opportunity (1993:7).

It is also the case that not everyone who can read succeeds materially and many people seem to survive and prosper without reading. Children may see adults managing perfectly well without ever seeming to read--even if they can.

Those who get to read, what they read and what they do with their reading are socially and culturally determined. Practices and institutions which act as gatekeepers frequently determine who gets to read by controlling access to skills, to books, to different forms of discourse, to varieties of language and to languages themselves. James Tollefson says:

> [W]hile modern social and economic systems require certain kinds of language competence, they simultaneously create conditions which ensure that vast numbers of people will be unable to acquire that competence (1991:7).

The kinds of texts that people get to read are as important in constructing them as readers as the ability to read is. Sarland argues that books are "but part of the

wider social meaning making that is culture" (1991:4). For children, what they are given to read and what they make of it can turn them into different types of readers. For instance, Jacqueline Rose argues that the simplified texts offered in primary school classrooms lead children, many of whom will not go beyond elementary education, towards impoverished and utilitarian reading habits. On the other hand, children from more privileged backgrounds are often the recipients of a more powerful literacy as they go further with their schooling and are offered more challenging texts. In her work on the different versions of Peter Pan, Rose says that Barrie's frequently rewritten work reflects the different uses of language for different classes of children. She says:

> Language and literature are released as objects of policy by means of which the child's relation to its culture can be defined (1985:92).

She argues that elementary prose is no more neutral than classical prose, that functional prose serves as a preparation for manual work (although changing technology has created a new crisis here) and it is misleading to see an ideal sequence from elementary to cultured language. She also points out that simple language can be seen as either uncorrupted and true, or as deprived. The dilemma created here is: to what extent do simplified books help or limit children in their reading?

Institutions such as schools, which socialise children, do not only offer different kinds of texts. They also reinforce different ways of reading. For example, in an environment where strategies like interrogating the text are taught, children are helped in what Taxel calls the "demystification of hegemonic selective traditions" (1989:41). Such demystification can help learners, particularly bilingual learners, to deal with the complexities of a language. Other institutions may reinforce a sense of helplessness in the selfsame pupils by exposing them to limited and limiting texts, and not encouraging them to position the texts and understand where they come from.

Another deeply embedded influence on how people read is the patterns of language and culture to which they are accustomed. If culture and language construct thought, even apparently simple and straightforward texts can disempower children who come from language and class backgrounds which do not match their reading matter. Lev Vygotsky, writing about thought and language, says:

> Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relationship between things (1962:125).

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann say, "Language forces me into its patterns" (1966:53). C.A.Bowers and David Flinders point out that "language and thought are dependent on metaphor, and....metaphors are usually taken for granted" (1991:12). They are also socially and culturally selected. Children whose background and primary culture differ from the mainstream may have difficulty with certain language patterns. When it comes to reading, they may choose books that are more congenial to them or abandon the effort and stop reading altogether. Henrietta Dombey (1988) points out that, just as the rules of classroom discourse remain implicit and unfamiliar to many bilingual learners, the discourse of what they read may also remain unfamiliar and difficult to understand.

Reading is also a social activity because people talk to one another about what they read. David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green say that even though reading is often perceived as a solitary activity, it is an inherently social process.

> [I]t involves a recognition that the meaning of a text is not established by the reader in isolation. On the contrary, meanings are defined through social interaction, and particularly through talk. As John Fiske has argued, talk about popular media can be seen as part of a broader "oral culture." Meanings which circulate within everyday discussion of texts are "read back" into individual responses, thereby generating a dynamic interplay between "social" and "individual" readings--and perhaps rendering the distinction itself irrelevant (1993:4).

Once people have established the meanings of texts they position themselves in relation to those meanings. Buckingham and Sefton-Green continue:

> [M]aking sense of the media is a process in which individual and collective identities are defined and negotiated. In making meaning, and in establishing our own tastes and preferences, we are simultaneously defining the meanings of our own social lives and positions (1993:9).

In a review of research on the learning and teaching of reading, P.David Pearson identifies a number of common themes that have appeared in recent years. He points out that the most prevalent metaphors in the research have been those of the reader as "builder" and as "fixer." The builder is an active, aggressive processor of language. The fixer is a problem solver, drawing on "metacognitive strategies to repair virtually any comprehension failure that may arise" (1993:503). He says further that the dominant view is that

> every reader and writer has to build a satisfying and complete model of meaning for every text they create, be it in the process of reading, writing,

> speaking or listening. A second consistent thread is the dominance of context in explaining both basic processes and instructional practices; reading as a social event seems to be a well-established phenomenon (1993:509).

This chapter has been concerned with the complexity of the reading process, its links to culture, and ways in which access is facilitated or curtailed by institutions, hierarchies and power interests. These are all factors which influence which children read, why they do it and what kinds of texts they choose to read. The next chapter will look at some of the issues surrounding the selection of books for children.

CHAPTER 2
SELECTION AND IDEOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the role of book selectors, especially those who select for school children. It will then go on to raise a number of concerns that currently affect the selection process. These include some of the features of books that make them easier or more difficult to understand, changes in political consciousness, stereotyping, relevance and escapism.

Selectors

How reading and readers are constructed gives rise to a number of issues in the writing and selection of books for children. To a large extent children's books are mediated by adults, who write them, publish them, sell them, buy them as parents and librarians, and sometimes read them aloud. Meek says:

> In the early stages, adults choose books for children. They do this remembering their own early experiences, or prompted by what is popular, promoted or available. They are guided in their choices by their own ideologies and values, by what their friends suggest or what they think the school approves of. But, sooner than their parents often realise, children become choosers on their own account. They have preferences which we do well to respect, even if we do not always care for what they choose (1991:64).

Selectors are usually appointed by institutions to ensure that children are exposed to books that carry those values which are held by their particular social interest group. Their intervention in children's reading is usually seen as acceptable, as adults are regarded as responsible for the socialisation of young people into their society. Selectors' criteria are governed by their understandings of what reading is for, and by their own perceptions of what readers want and what selectors think is good for them. As Philippe Aries (1962) has shown, conceptions of childhood change over time and in different contexts. Selectors may recognise that their interests do not always coincide with those of children but the extent to

which they make concessions depends on their own construction of childhood and their ability to trust children to make their own judgements. This may entail stepping out of the role well-intentioned middle-class professionals described by Maxine Greene, that of people "who have no real faith in the capacities of the students ...with whom they work " (1978:96), although they are committed to transforming an unjust social order on their behalf.

In general, children's literature is seen as serving a moral purpose, providing pleasure, or doing both. But ultimately, nearly all children's literature is chosen for its didactic or socialising function. Stephens says:

> Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience (1992:3).

Writers may, of course, be opposed to some of the values, beliefs and practices of the day. Then their didactic purpose lies in exposing abuses of power and what they see as harmful beliefs, or in changing perceptions by presenting things in a different light, or in contrasting different norms. Selectors may share the values of these writers and choose their works. Sometimes the books are not particularly controversial, like Babette Cole's parodies of gender stereotypes. But there are some books, like the works of Robert Cormier, which Stephens describes as "endemically transgressive of such things as social authority, received paradigms of behaviour and morality, and major literary genres" (1992:147). Choosing such books for children can create controversy, which is one of the reasons why book selectors may not choose them. However, the appearance and acceptance of more and more books portraying alternative lifestyles, for example, can be an indication of a society in transition, where different ways of behaviour are becoming less stigmatised.

A writer's aims and ideology will be encoded either explicitly or implicitly in the discourse of the book. To quote Stephens again:

> As with discourse in general, the discourses of children's fiction are pervaded by ideological presuppositions, sometimes obtrusively and sometimes invisibly (1992:1).

Stephens goes on the say that the ideological dimension of children's books is unavoidable and "not necessarily undesirable" in the sense that ideology as a system of beliefs helps people to make sense of and take part in their world. Children have to master the signifying codes of society. The principal code is language and it is often at its most powerful in the telling of stories. He says that "one particular use

of language through which society seeks to exemplify and inculcate its current values and attitudes is the imagining and recording of stories" (1992:8).

The way that stories are received, of course, may not be what selectors expect. Individuals bring their own repertoires, and different societal attitudes influence response. For example, Heath (1983) demonstrates that some cultural groups take books of narrative fiction for granted as a way of understanding themselves, while others see literacy as a way of gaining a living and therefore too important to be wasted on stories.

Features of books

A basic issue in book selection is the extent to which books support readers through the kind of language they use and other features of their design. This is a particular concern for those bilingual readers who may find little support for a second language outside of their reading.

Anne Mcgill-Franzen believes that the contribution of easy-to-read books is being undervalued by educators who want to make reading programmes literature based. Drawing on a set of guidelines by Barbara Petersen, she says supports include the arrangement of words and sentences on a page, illustrations and the structure of language itself. At the easiest levels text is fully predictable from the illustrations. Repetitive language, in the form of whole sentences, words, refrains or language patterns, also provides support. She says:

> As illustrations provide less and less supportive context, the book becomes more difficult in that the reader is more dependent on the text itself. Just as complex sentence patterns in harder books are not predictable from sentences on previous pages, unfamiliar vocabulary is not cued by illustrations in more difficult texts (1993:425).

A tension can develop here when there are limited resources. If selectors choose predominantly easy books, children may be exposed to little other than elementary, and ultimately limiting, uses of language.

Changes in political consciousness: race, class, gender

Changes in political consciousness over time mean that new issues constantly emerge from the world and take their place in book selection. As most writers and selectors feel that books influence behaviour, where they stand in relation to these issues defines their ideological stance. Books offer their readers many different views of the world. For instance, Rudine Sims Bishop says that some books offer "reflections" where people can see their own lives mirrored and their values reaffirmed. Other books are "windows onto worlds and people different from, and yet similar to, themselves" (1992:21). As political perspectives change, certain views of the world are promoted while others lose favour.

The effects of changing perspectives in the last two decades can be seen in the attempts to incorporate into children's literature more images and themes that reflect multicultural and non-sexist values, in the place of what were felt to be the colonialist and male dominated ones found in many books. Mem Fox calls this "chasing the 'isms' from children's books" (1993:654).

An "ism" that has come in for a great deal of censure, particularly in the South African context, is racism. Many critics world-wide have exposed how black people are portrayed as caricatures, servants and minor characters in children's books. Andree-Jeanne Totemeyer (1994) has done an extensive analysis of "the racial element" in South African children's literature and shown how overt racism has declined over the years, only to be replaced, in many cases, by covert racism.

Bishop identifies four types of book which try to redress racism. The first is consciously interracial. It may be visually integrated or focus on people of different backgrounds interacting with one another. It aims to "project a vision of a multicultural, multiracial society" (1992:23). The second type features people of colour but there is no attempt to reflect a culture different from the dominant one. Characters are depicted positively as participants in the mainstream. The third kind deals directly with the experience of a distinct cultural group and little attention is paid to integration. It may reflect distinctive language patterns or portray a particular aspect of a specific culture. The fourth focuses on coping with racism and discrimination.

While it may be important that children should read books that are not racist, certain pitfalls and complexities need to be considered. One is that a policy of selecting books about blacks for black children can develop, and be perceived as a

form of racism. Another is that diversity amongst black children themselves may not be recognised. The different interests and identities of children in black communities may be overlooked as books are chosen primarily because they are about black characters.

An example of identity becoming an issue is the way in which books portraying the lives of poor black people may be received. The point was brought home to me at a workshop in Cape Town on racism in children's books, where groups of teachers were asked to look at books that treated black people in a positive way and then to discuss how the books could be used in their classrooms. One book, *At the Crossroads*, was about children waiting up all night for their migrant worker fathers to return from the mines. It was obvious that a teacher in the group discussing it simply did not like the book, even though she said she could use it (unspecified how) in her classroom. She felt it did not depict the way her pupils lived. They did not stand outside and wash in a shared tin bath and no-one had relatives in the mines. It became clear that she thought it was absurd to romanticise life in squatter homes. She was not alone in this feeling. In defence of the book, one of the facilitators pointed out that showing squatter homes in stories did not mean that they were seen as desirable or that people should aspire to nothing else. What the story sought to do was show that people could live with love and dignity in such places. She suggested the book could be used to talk about why people end up living as they do. The teacher still looked unconvinced. Clearly the book did not provide an accurate reflection of the lives of her pupils and, at the same time, it was not wanted as a window. It was too close, they already knew about it.

While one could argue with the teacher's view of what reading is for, what she was resisting was an equation of race, class and culture. This kind of over-simplification is referred to by Junko Yokota who quotes K.M.Reimer's analysis of literature selected for American elementary classrooms. She says there is

> a predominance of Euro-American authors writing multicultural literature from an 'outside' point of view...and a grouping together of certain different cultures as if they were one (1993:157).

One way readers may resist this grouping together is by choosing to align themselves along lines of class, not colour or culture. For example, a study of school children in Zimbabwe by Julie Fredericks indicates "an increasing identification of black, middle-class students with their counterparts across the racial divide" (1992:119). For them, social class has become more important than race.

Class, of course, is an "ism" on its own. A great many books for children legitimise the values of the Western middle classes. Bob Dixon (1977) points out that this extends to the kind of language used, derogatory descriptions of the working classes, the complete absence of working class children and the ways in which class conflicts are resolved. While much of this may have changed in more recent books, it remains an issue. Selectors may want to choose books that deal with conflicts in ways that do not privilege the middle classes or books that reflect the lifestyles of different social groups.

But once again, it is necessary to be wary of categorising a book on its overall political message and assuming that readers will go along with it. Sarland gives the example of working class boys reading the politically conservative *First Blood*. They read against the ideology which framed the text and identified with the subversive incidents within the text. They admired the hero, Rambo, because he physically assaulted establishment figures.

However, recognising different interpretations is not the same as legitimising them. Chris Kearney, discussing voice and silence, says the important question is: "Who decides which voices are legitimised and which are not?" (1990:8). Cynthia Lewis, in an article on acknowledging social differences in reading, describes how she read a story with a boy in her class. The moral he drew from the story did not match that intended by the author. She notes that, even as she encouraged him to share his responses and experiences with her, she realised how often children are expected to fit in with teachers' expectations and how quickly they learn that "their experiences won't help them if these experiences do not fit the 'shared culture' of the classroom" (1993:460). Children who challenge the voice of authority are often sidelined because their voices carry less legitimacy. Lewis says of her experience:

> [I]t was not just Rick's voice and my own that filled the room that day, but many others, including the voice of *authority*, in the form of interpretations sanctioned by middle-class social codes and school culture, as well as the voice of *resistance*, both mine and Rick's (1993:460).

The issue of sexism in books has been dealt with extensively in feminist literature (Oakley, 1976; Weitzman et al, 1976; and many others). It suffices to say that male dominance has had its effect on the number and quality of girl role models offered to readers of children's literature. Also, the socialisation that girls receive means that the books which they choose to read are often different from those boys choose.

Shifts in Emphases

Over the past few years there have been shifts in the emphases given to a number of the concerns mentioned. In the South African context, for example, the proceedings of the first conference on children's literature, Towards Understanding: Children's Literature for Southern Africa (Cilliers, 1985) show a greater concern with racism than did the conference which followed in 1992. Ten out of 41 presentations dealt directly with racism, as did much of the general discussion. At the next conference there was a broader range of interest, with none dealing specifically with race. This could have something to do with political changes and the official ending of apartheid; or the appearance of more South African children's literature in the last five years, making the issue less urgent; or simply a feeling that the issue had been overworked and overtaken by others.

Stereotypes

The three "isms" mentioned above are often found together in the form of stereotypes, another matter of concern for book selectors. Stereotypes typify the behaviour of different groups of people, presenting a limited picture of certain readily identifiable groups, usually based on class, race and gender. The social relationships of these groups and characters are also representative rather than unique. As a result, stereotypes are not perceived as allowing for growth and change and may be so negative in their presentation that they reinforce social divisions and encourage prejudice and conflict.

However, stereotypes can also be problematised. They are not simply manifestations of poor writing and mindless prejudice, but can also be seen as cultural markers. Young children who are still trying to make sense of the world may welcome the familiarity of stereotypes, even if, when challenged, they may agree that the people they know do not really fit into them. Sarland calls stereotypes "sites of cultural typification" (1991:81), which offer children an opportunity to learn their culture and help inexperienced readers through their books. He says:

> ...I would argue that such generalisations are of vital importance to adolescents learning about adult relationships. Popular fiction constructs generalities, values, and views of relationships which the young can use in order to begin to understand the world and their place in it...."Marriage", "love", "normal sexuality", "normal relationships", right", "wrong", "order", "chaos", are all cultural constructs. If we want to know how such categories are currently constructed by the culture, then the first place to go

> to will be the primary means of cultural communication--the popular arts: television, video and popular literature (1991:67).

He says that the same principle of learning a culture through popular fiction applies to younger readers, although in their case they are learning "the specific culture of childhood itself" (1991:81).

Stereotypes and formulaic stories offer children more than cultural information. They also provide safe, easily negotiable routes for inexperienced readers. Fry says they give readers "context support" (1985:54). Drawing on the work of Ronald Morris who says that readers need less and less of this kind of support as they become more experienced, he describes what happens to Karnail, one of the boys in his study of young readers. Karnail was a weak, but keen, reader. Then he discovered the Secret Seven books, where his "expectations of text [were] confirmed not only from book to book, but from chapter to chapter and even from sentence to sentence" (1985:54). They became his chief form of reading. He appeared not to move forward as a reader, but he was gradually becoming more confident. The books gave him access to something he had only observed in others previously. He now experienced the spell-binding quality of reading. His Secret Seven phase was an important stepping stone in his reading career, allowing him to grow as a reader.

For selectors a problem arises when stereotypes are crude and insulting. They may present an image of a group of people which is offensive as a "mirror" and inaccurate as a "window." Perry Nodelman says that while "for inexperienced readers everything is new and fresh, even tired cliches," this is no excuse for providing nothing else. He feels children need to move on to more "subtle complexities" (1987:38).

Relevance and Escapism

Another aspect of the debates around "isms" in book selection is that of realism and "relevance" in children's books. Relevant books are seen as those which present children with mirrors of their own reality. They may also be seen as relatively free of the "isms" which present views of reality considered inappropriate for a particular readership. The argument is that when children are consistently denied images that reflect their own ethnicity, religion, class or gender it may undermine their sense of identity. This is something that has been articulated by

many writers from marginalised communities. For example, Laurence Yep describes how he felt trying to build a Chinese sense of reality in San Francisco:

> I felt very much like the Invisible Man, without form and without shape. It was as if all the features on my face had been erased and I was just a blank mirror reflecting other people's hopes and fears (in Bishop 1992:20).

Mildred D.Taylor, accepting the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award in 1989, tells of the stories that enraged and inspired her as a child. She says:

> [A]s a child growing up in the forties and fifties, I needed black heroes. I needed them desperately and at no time more than the year...I found myself the only black child in my class. During that year and the years that followed, classes devoted to the history of black people in the United States always caused me painful embarrassment....To me this lackluster history of black people, totally devoid of any heroic or pride building qualities, was as much a condemnation of myself as it was of my ancestors. I used to sit tensely waiting out those class hours trying to think of ways to repudiate what the textbooks said, for I recognised that there was a terrible contradiction between what was in them and what I learned at home (1989:180).

Pat Mora, a Hispanic writer explains why she writes. This is one of her reasons:

> I write because I believe Hispanics need to take their rightful place in American literature. We need to be published and to be studied in schools and colleges so that the stories and ideas of our people won't quietly disappear (1990:436).

These writers have written books chronicling the lives of their communities. The issue is not so much whether such books should be written--I believe they should--but again it is that of oversimplifying and limiting choice to being within "relevant" boundaries.

This comes back to a recognition of the diversity of interests and roles that may be found in one individual or in a seemingly homogeneous group of people. Brenda Cooper raises this issue and the related one of who has the right to speak on behalf of a group. In unravelling the rights of critics and writers to writ**e about "the other", she discusses the politics of identity. She quotes Sidonie Smith who rejects

> any simplistic or romanticised notion of "marginality," recognising instead that positions of marginalities and centralities are nomadic, that each of us, multiply positioned in discursive fields, inhabits margins and centers (in Cooper, forthcoming).

The nomadic aspect of identity implies that relevance need not be limited to the more obvious features of a particular readership. There may be other internal relevances. Collective and personal identities may not coincide. Also, in trying to be relevant, selectors may exclude books that provide "windows" allowing for imaginative identification with others. Peter Traves, writing about entitlement to literacy, says:

> Students should be encouraged to be adventurous in their reading, both in what they read and how they read it. This is a challenge to more limited conceptions of relevance. We should make fewer assumptions about what will interest children at particular ages or from particular backgrounds. Students should be encouraged to develop a more extensive sense of cultural ownership through their reading. Schools ought to develop in children a defiance of cultural boundaries that will allow them to gain powers of choice over what they choose to read, watch, write, listen to, make. Choosing not to read Milton or Ngugi because you don't enjoy their work is real choice, choosing not to because you think they are for someone from a different class or culture is not (1992:84).

There are two other issues I would like to touch on that arise out of a discussion on relevance. They are the importance of theme versus story, and that of escapism.

Sometimes books appear to offer interesting themes and characters but the story does not have a satisfying resolution. Or the reverse is true. Younger readers, particularly, seem to place emphasis on a good story. John Appleyard, writing about how people become readers, suggests that readers take on five different roles, which seem to follow a "fairly predictable sequence" (1990:14). The first is the role of the reader as a player, as in the child who listens to stories and becomes a player in a fantasy world that is gradually sorted out and controlled. The next role is that of hero or heroine. Appleyard says:

> The school-age child is the central figure of a romance that is constantly being rewritten as the child's picture of the world and how people behave in it is filled in and clarified. Stories here seem to be an alternate, more organised, and less ambiguous world than the world of pragmatic experience, one the reader easily escapes into and becomes involved with (1990:14).

The third role is that of the reader as thinker. In this the reader, often adolescent, looks to stories to discover insights into the meaning of life, values and beliefs, ideal images and authentic role models to emulate. These ideas and ways of living are then judged in terms of their truth.

The fourth role is that of interpreter, who studies literature systematically and learns to talk analytically about it. In the final role is the pragmatic reader, who reads in several ways and who uses and modifies the earlier roles as they are needed.

Appleyard points out that these roles are not universal. He says:

> [It] can be argued that these roles describe an education in the mainstream culture's values as much as they do an evolution of innate human capacities. In some respects, therefore, they describe what is the case, not what needs to be the case (1990:15).

The roles, which readers may revisit at any time, offer a way of situating the responses of young readers. They also provide a possible explanation as to why relevant or inappropriate seeming themes may appear at times to pass them by as they engage more with plot and story.

An unwillingness to engage with serious or relevant issues is sometimes dismissed as escapism. Victor Nell in a book on the psychology of reading for pleasure, says escapism is seen as looking for mental or emotional distraction from the realities of life. He says that the term is used within a pejorative, moralistic framework, where fantasising is perceived as "woolgathering at a time when the world of work calls" (1988:32). Reading escapist literature is often accompanied by a sense of guilt, not only because it is done at the expense of more serious activity, but because the reading matter is seen as "trash." Although young readers may be more enthusiastic and less apologetic than this about their reading, teachers and librarians very soon instil notions that some kinds of reading are too easy and pleasurable to be good. Nell suggests that escapism should rather be recognised as having a therapeutic value.

The influences on selectors are many, varied and constantly changing. The extent to which children are empowered or bound to their situation by what they read is unclear. Although much of what children read may pass them by, a great deal remains with them. Many adults have vivid memories of books that were loved, terrifying or edifying. Meek says that young people read both to please themselves and to please their elders and "[n]o-one has yet proved which of these two sets of texts has played the greater part in readers literacies" (1991:188.)

The next chapters will attempt to identify where the selection policies used to provide the children with books diverge from readers' interests, and from one an-

other. They will also address the issue of trying to find what common ground lies between the young readers interviewed, in spite of all the variables.

CHAPTER 3
METHOD

The aim of this research was to investigate the selection of fiction both for and by children in the senior primary phase of their schooling. It attempts to examine what governs the selection process; the response of children to what is selected for them; how children see themselves as readers; and what they choose for themselves.

The method arose from the need to observe and speak to children engaged in choosing books and to find out more about how books were selected for them. What follows will be largely a description of what was done in and around two schools, who was involved, and why certain choices were made.

Research was conducted through a number of interviews and conversations, and a monitored procedure in which groups of children chose books from a bookshop for their classmates. The books chosen were then bought for the school, so that the selection was a meaningful activity.

The research was intended to be a starting point for comparing the perceptions of young readers with those of their book selectors. Two schools were visited, where small groups of children took part in the research. Fry, who restricted his study of how children perceive themselves as readers to only six children, believes that small studies are "revealing and helpful because of their particularity" and hopes that "their value will increase as they join, and are joined by, other similar studies of individual readers" (1985:1). This is not a detailed study but it is intended in some way to "join the others." More central to this thesis is Fry's contention that there is a value in matching our own experience of books against that of young readers. He says:

> [A]s readers ourselves, we are interested in our own responses; and as people interested in children's reading, we want to know what we still have in common with young readers and in what ways we are different (1985:5).

Working with small groups was done in the hope that it would encourage children to speak more freely in the time available. Speaking to individuals on their own needs a longer period, both to set up meetings and for children to loosen up if they are shy. Working with large groups may mean that less confident individuals get no chance to speak. Sarland, when studying the relationship between the meanings young people generate in their reading of fictional texts and the meanings they bring to the texts, found that small groups allow "pupils time to talk at length and in depth, and also to digress and anecdotalise away from the text" (1991:24). Another consideration in this research was getting together children who shared an interest in reading and wanted to talk about it.

The scope and style of the project meant that any serious comparison of variables like gender, age, ethnicity, class, reading styles and cognitive ability could not be made. Instead issues arose in the course of conversation about books. These issues and responses are seen as part of the social context, following Sarland's contention that "response is but an aspect of wider cultural meaning making" (1991:23), and the method was used "to allow evidence to emerge from the culture of the young people concerned." The emphasis of the research ultimately fell on trying to uncover and compare themes, topics and ways of presenting stories favoured by selectors and children. The children were from different language backgrounds so there is an attempt to relate preferences to conditions at school, language spoken and previous exposure to books.

The views of teachers and book selectors were obtained through interviews and conversations, both face to face and telephonically.

The schools

The research took place at two schools in the greater Cape Town area. The schools are presently under the control of different education departments and serve different communities. They are part of a systen of education based on racial segregation, now in the process of transformation. One school, Good Hope Seminary Primary, falls under the control of the Cape Education Department. It is a Model C school, which means it was originally established for white children only, but has since become non-racial. It enrols predominantly English speaking pupils. The other school is Walter Teka Higher Primary, a Department of

Education and Training school for Xhosa speakers. Both schools are expected to teach through the medium of English and both supply pupils with English fiction to read in their leisure time. Neither school sees itself as serving an affluent community, but their facilities reflect the differential funding provided under apartheid.

The schools were chosen so that comparisons could be made between different systems, as well as between different pupils. The differences between the schools have effects on a range of concerns, including how teaching is done and the priorities of book selectors. It is possible to learn from the shortcomings and strengths of both.

My original intention was to work only with Std 5 children. This was so that the Xhosa speaking children would have had more chance to develop reading experience and competence in English, and be able to speak about their reading with more confidence. However, when Std 3 and 4 children arrived for interviews from Good Hope it became clear that their insights were worth including, and their reading choices showed closer parallels with older second language children. As there were fewer Std 4s, I have quoted mainly from the two Std 5 groups and the Std 3s.

Walter Teka Higher Primary

I approached Walter Teka through READ, the non-governmental organisation which has provided it with books, and which runs a group-reading scheme for some of the classes. 1)1) I accompanied READ's group-reading facilitator to the school and was introduced to the Std 5 English teacher who is in charge of the books from READ and controls the children's access to them. She was in her subject classroom, which she had organised to serve as a mini-library. In most schools supplied by READ the books are kept in separate classrooms in special wooden boxes with shelves. This teacher had put all the books donated for the Std 5s into one room so that reading could form an integral part of the English lessons. Children were allowed to take books home, although a conventional library system was not yet in place.

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1) From now on the schools will be referred to as Walter Teka and Good Hope.

Three days after the first contact the teacher saw to it that groups of children from all the Std 5 classes were waiting ready to talk in the English classroom . There were 48 children altogether, divided into eight groups. The purpose of the exercise was explained to them--that I was doing research on children's reading and would value their comments--and they were told about the plan for a small group to select books for the class at a later stage. A discussion then ensued which lasted for two hours.

Initially I tried writing a number of questions relating to reading habits and preferences on the chalk board, and asked the children to talk about them in their groups. This rapidly proved to be a futile strategy, unlikely to get any honest or accurate answers. For instance, a whole group would claim that they all read two hours a day, partly because they thought it was the correct kind of answer to give and partly because they were not giving the range of replies within the group. My next strategy was to ask the groups to select a book that they had all enjoyed or wished to read from the shelves. I then went from group to group and discussed the books and the children's views on reading. This was more productive as individual differences emerged and there was some sort of dialogue instead of undifferentiated answers. At the end of the session one group of children stayed behind and expressed interest in further discussion. They formed the nucleus of the smaller group with whom subsequent interviews were held.

After this there was one more visit to the school to interview the English teacher and to arrange and pay for a group of six children to go to a bookshop in the city. Three days later the children met at the bookshop.

Then an interval of two and a half weeks elapsed during which the children read the books they had chosen before meeting again to discuss them. This was the last group meeting and took place in an informal way over lunch at a private school in the vicinity of the bookshop. A bilingual Std 9 pupil from the private school was on hand to act as an interpreter if the children felt they needed help. During the whole process there were a number of telephonic exchanges with the teacher and one of the pupils to clarify points as they came up.

Good Hope Seminary Primary

A similar process took place at Good Hope. I approached the vice-principal and asked about interviewing Std 5 pupils. She selected a group of children from

Std 3 to Std 5, most of whom were keen readers. We met in the school library on two occasions, once to discuss their general reading preferences and look at what they found interesting on the shelves and once to continue the discussion and talk about their response to the books of Roald Dahl whom they had all read. Then they too visited the bookshop to choose books for their classmates, and had a follow-up session three weeks later. To find out more about the selection of books available to them in the school library, I interviewed the school principal, who was also the librarian, and the senior primary book selector for the Cape Education Department. As most of the children belonged to the local public library, I also interviewed the children's librarian there. She was able to provide information about book selection and, as she knew many of the children in the group, she could give further insights into their reading preferences.

The sessions at the bookshop where books were bought for the schools followed a similar pattern for both groups. Before the children arrived I laid out a pre-selection of thirty books for them to look at first. This was to limit responses to the same sample initially and so that children would not be distracted by too many books. The books covered a range of interests, length and language difficulty. (See appendix for full list.) The children were asked to pick out the books they personally would most like to read and then, as a group, decide on one book for their whole class. However, once the initial choice had been made, the children were free to browse around and change their book choices for others from the shelves if they wanted to do so.

There was a great deal of debate and discussion around the books, which will be described in more detail in Chapter 5.

Concluding remarks

The only book that was high on the list of possible choices at both schools was The Mystery of Mr E. As I wanted to have at least one book that had been read by most of the pupils I bought it for both schools. I also bought a Choose Your Own Adventure story for the Walter Teka children, who had not been exposed to that kind of book before. As there were not two of the same title in stock I bought different one. However, in this case the issue was more the way the story was written than its content,

During conversations I took notes or used a tape recorder. Teachers were not present, partly because they were busy and partly to encourage children to speak without any of the constraints they might have felt with teachers present. The exception was the Good Hope visit to the bookshop when the librarian transported the children in the school vehicle.

The next two chapters will discuss what emerged from conversations with book selectors and children.

CHAPTER 4
THE SELECTORS IN THIS STUDY

This chapter will examine what went into the selection process of books at Walter Teka and Good Hope. It will discuss the aims and the nature of the choices of selectors for the two schools. There will then be comment on how this relates to some of the issues raised earlier.

The selectors in this study have distinct ideological positions. Their criteria for book selection are influenced by their ideology and by the social context in which they work.

The Walter Teka selectors

The children of Walter Teka are supplied with books by READ. The school falls under the Department of Education and Training but this body has not made libraries a priority in the educational facilities it provides. The reasons for this are complex and related to the different financial provision made for children of different racial groups under apartheid, as well as what was considered appropriate for them.

READ was established in 1979 in reaction to government policy. Its purpose was to address the lack of library and reading facilities in the black community. It was an attempt at redress for the most deprived, underpinned by a belief that reading would help children to get ahead. It now operates in eleven regions supplying books and resources and running training projects. Its current aims, as spelt out by Edward Tenza, deputy director, at the Annual General meeting in September 1993, are:

* enabling students to fit into the world of literacy and technology
* equipping students with 21st century skills

* empowering the individual to play a role in a better South Africa
* developing literacy and community skills for nation building
* embarking on a programme to recapture a culture of learning. 1)

These aims are political in that they indicate opposition to apartheid and support for current moves toward change. The terms "empowerment...in a better South Africa" and "nation building" imply this. However, the aims do not question the dominant ideological stance of modern industrial society or of the Western educational systems, which Michael Stubbs describes as "thoroughly verbal and textual" (1990:558). They are assimilationist in tone. They show an acceptance of certain requirements of industry and a desire to conform rather than question them. This is suggested by the use of metaphors like "fitting in" with the world of literacy and technology. and "equipping with skills."

These political aims are reflected to some extent in the choice of books for children and to a greater extent in the choice of language medium. An indicator that READ wants to enable access to the mainstream is the fact that the books provided for schools are all or mainly in English. This is, of course, because schools are required to teach through the medium of English after Std 3--how successfully this happens is not the issue here. Another consideration is that relatively few books are published in indigenous languages. But equally significant is the lack of challenge to this situation and the assumption that English is the language of social and economic advancement.

The issue raised by privileging English is that it entrenches inequality. As Tollefson reminds us:

> Whenever people must learn a new language to have access to education or to understand classroom instruction, language is a factor in creating and sustaining social and economic divisions (1991:9).

In South Africa knowledge of English is used as one of the gatekeepers in the economic system. READ's aim is to enable more children to get through the gate, not to knock it down.

This is not to say that READ's assessment of what its clients want is incorrect or that it is failing to respond to their needs. English commonly is perceived to be

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1)The list of aims is taken from a speech given at the READ Annual General Meeting, where I took notes.

the language of advancement, certainly through the formal sector and institutions. The compilers of the NEPI report on language policy in South Africa note that in their investigations "[w]hat has been foregrounded is the need to widen access to English" (1992:43), although they make it clear that they see problems with the demand itself and finding ways of meeting it.

The fact that the READ books are in English means that selectors have to take into account varying degrees of language competence and the difficulties children may have with unfamiliar terminology and ways of saying things. Awareness of this is reflected in a report on a workshop on criteria for creating a children's book at the READ conference of 1990. Sue Hepker reports and recommends:

> In South Africa, amongst children who speak English as a second language, language competence may not be at the same level of development as cognitive competence. Stories should therefore be as complex as they need to be, but texts should convey the story as clearly as possible. Writers should be on their guard not to be "reductivist."...Nor should idiomatic expressions be eliminated....Overlong structures, or the use of unnecessarily complex sentences, may break the reader's interaction with the text while she/he battles to unravel its meaning (1990:24).

In an interview, the READ primary schools book selector said that this means that selectors look for books with "accessible English." For reading aloud, they favour books that rely on repetition of words and phrases. The story arrangement is also considered. In general, books for Std 1 have one sentence per page and increase to approximately three sentences per page for Std 3. Selectors look for books where illustrations support the text.

The workshop participants also noted a need for books without text as they felt that visual literacy should be developed. "Cute" images and cluttered visual conventions were considered unsuitable in the South African context. The book selector said that artists like Shirley Hughes were avoided, as she depicts a life style which is too different from that of the readers. Of course, other views could be argued. Certain "cute" conventions can be seen as representative of popular signs and of modern life. Different lifestyles provide windows into other worlds. The point is that READ favours books whose illustrations reflect images that are thought to be familiar, though not necessarily popular or promoted.

When it comes to the content of the books a number of points emerge from the 1990 report on criteria. The emphasis lies on books giving pleasure. There is no

specific mention of promoting skills, but enjoyment of books is seen as a way of gaining confidence generally.

Certain sources of enjoyment are identified. Many of them can be seen as arbitrary or defined solely from an adult perspective, as it is not recorded how they were established. I present them uncritically. They are:

* recognition of the self--both real and mythic
* the feeling that reality can be changed
* comedy
* a story that moves the emotions
* consolidation of what the reader knows
* stories that reflect a familiar environment
* stories that extend perceptions and reflect differ ent environments
* stories with strong atmosphere
* stories that stimulate curiosity.

Mediation was also a factor. The workshop participants felt that good stories lent themselves to use in a variety of ways by teachers and other mediators as well as children. However, they stressed that enjoyment, not didacticism, should be the primary aim.

Attention is also devoted to the relationship between writers and readers and some of the pitfalls to be avoided are listed. These are:

* patronising the reader
* potential disharmony in mixing cultural images, structures and styles
* inconsistency, not ringing true
* lack of originality
* covering serious issues like death and racial interaction without providing some comfort and positive affirmation
* writing/illustrating to please a particular group, leading to the creation of stereotypes and charac ters that do not ring true

* inauthentic dialogue

The final point was that books should promote cultural tolerance and provide "a bridge across the abyss apartheid has created." The aims and concerns listed reflect READ's position as a promoter of general reading, of academic success, of interracial understanding and of assimilation.

The criteria and recommendations are wide ranging. When it comes to the actual selection of books some are inevitably given more weight then others. The following information again comes from the READ book selector.

The selector says that books of fiction and non-fiction are provided in a ratio of 60:40. This indicates that factual and technical information are seen as important. However, the effectiveness of learning English through fiction is still given more weight.

With regard to content of books of fiction, the emphasis has fallen on relevance to the children's lives. The two recommendations most assiduously pursued are consolidating what the readers know and reflecting a familiar environment. The selector says that although fantasy is not excluded and stories are not always about black characters, "realistic and relevant" books are favoured. Preference is given to local books.

The selectors also build on what is known to be popular--folk tales and Ladybird series fairy tales for younger children and mystery and adventure stories for older children. But they try to find African settings. Some publishers are now producing books to fulfil this need. Examples are the Heinemann Junior African Writers Series and the Maskew Miller Longman Young Africa Series. These books are recognised to have faults, like "awful illustrations" but they are "at least set in Southern Africa." There is a feeling that the children "can accept the situation." The clincher is that they are reasonably cheap.

The ideological standpoint of the selectors is that apartheid and racism have seen to it that books provided in the past exclude the culture or the physical attributes of black readers. This perception is reinforced by research, like a study of English literature set for senior schools by Jane Reid. She says of the education system:

> All the departments make some attempt to prescribe South African works, but with most the attempt amounts only to the inclusion of a few poems or short stories by white South African writers;

and

> Nearly all the books read in school are set in Europe (or occasionally in America) and the accumulated impression must be that literature is something that happens overseas and the lives and feelings of English people living in England are the only ones really worth writing about (1984:46).

READ appears to agree with this assessment and has made an attempt at redress. By providing stories with local settings or about black people, it hopes to counteract the effects of seeing predominantly white people in practically all the media.

This opposition to the dominant practice of choosing Eurocentric books for African children means that the "ism" that is given most attention is racism. Books are chosen from all the categories listed by Sims Bishop, from confronting racism as something to be recognised and fought against (like biographies of Martin Luther King), to showing black people in powerful or at least middle class roles (like many of the Young African writers series).

The reader who is being constructed here is a child who needs the support of the familiar to embark on reading in a second language and needs to read simple English in order to understand what is written. The reader is assumed to seek out or relate more easily to positive racial role models and be more responsive to mirrors reflecting self and reality than windows into another world.

This construction may be broadly accurate, and an organisation like READ does not have the resources to cater for every possible preference. But it does raise issues like recognition of diversity and the question of how children's relation to class and culture are defined. The English teacher at Walter Teka raised some points during an interview. She expressed ambivalence about getting books with local settings. She felt that the although the children liked books that were relevant to their own situation, certain books "seem to be prescribed for blacks." Her own child attends a private non-racial school run on progressive lines. She has "never seen books for the township" amongst those her child brings home. There are several possible reasons for this--the selection available at the school; the child's desire to read what her peers read; the child's preference for settings that are not over-familiar. Whatever the reasons, the books available are helping to position her differently from the children her mother teaches. Local and simplified books may

make reading easier for children, but they may also be offering language and content that are ultimately limiting rather than liberating.

The dilemma for the Walter Teka selectors is this. On the one hand, many of the pupils do struggle with English and may not want to read anything that looks difficult. They may not be particularly motivated to learn English in any case. They are competent users of their mother tongue and that suffices for most day to day transactions. Nothing significant in their lives revolves around competency in English and they may feel socially and psychologically distanced from English speakers. But their chances of social mobility are not helped by exposure to little other than elementary English, even if it is other more powerful economic and cultural factors that ultimately keep them within certain social boundaries.

The Good Hope selectors

The children at Good Hope have a much greater collection of books to choose from. The school amalgamated with another school three years ago and was able to put together a library with what were thought to be the best books from both schools. In the days when the Department of Education funded libraries more generously books were selected by librarians from approved lists drawn up by the Education Library Service. As funding has been withdrawn, the school has bought books from its own funds, but it still uses the approved lists as a basis for selection. The librarian says that the school tries to cater for a range of ages and interests, although not all children can be satisfied.

The criteria for evaluation of books used by the Education Library Service are very similar to those listed by READ (see above, page 41). A recent hand-out on criteria for selection from the Education Library Service (no date) says that selection is done out of a sense of responsibility towards children and "not just to keep the worst from them, but to prevent their wasting valuable time and effort on the mediocre." In an interview, the selector for senior primary standards said that books chosen should be "worthwhile" and that selectors try to avoid causing offence wherever possible.

I will comment briefly on selection policy for the public library in Vredehoek, as the children say that they take more books from there than school because it offers a wider range. The policy is similar to that for school libraries, but is less flexible in some ways. The Cape Town City Libraries Service places emphasis on providing literature not just books. This is made clear in the file of information and

workshop reports issued to all children's librarians. Literature, as defined in a report on literature workshops for children's librarians, is reading which at its best provides both pleasure and an understanding of the human condition. It should reveal to the reader things like life's fragmentation, the institutions of society and nature as a force that influences us. It should provide form for experience and help the reader to focus on essentials. The importance of theme and character development in books is stressed. Librarians are expected to develop "critical thinking" and pass this on to readers.

This focus has meant that in the past no books by writers like Enid Blyton and no comic books like Tintin and Asterix were bought, on the grounds that they were not literature and the characters showed no development. This has changed, but the library has still not given in to the current popularity of "choose your own adventure" books and the *Where's Wally* series, where readers have to search for things in densely crowded pictures. Such books do not fulfil the required literary criteria. It could, of course, be argued that both types of book give the reader a highly active role and plenty of interactive engagement with the text and, in the Wally case, practice in visual literacy. But it seems that the aim of the selectors is to give children an entree into the "higher cultural life" referred to by Rose. The task of librarians is to move children through the formulaic series as swiftly as possible and into the realms of real literature. This is also the aim of the Education Library Service. But as the selector interviewed points out, they have to consider the large numbers of weak readers in schools so they also provide simplified reading books that are not found in the public libraries.

Both Good Hope Primary and the local public library cater mainly for English speakers. The only other language on offer is Afrikaans. Although the school's enrolment has changed considerably since it ceased to be an all-white institution, English has remained dominant. The multilingual nature of the pupils is recognised. But if any structural changes have taken place, they have not filtered through to the library. There are no books in languages other than English and Afrikaans. Nor are there any of the simplified readers with African settings favoured by READ, although a number of these are now on the Education Library Service lists. South African books are by established writers who are thought to have the right literary credentials, like Jenny Seed and Marguerite Poland, both overtly middle class writers.

The assumption is that children are able to speak English and need to have their linguistic skills enhanced, rather then developed from scratch, by their reading. There is more emphasis on books developing imagination. 2)

Where the aims of all these selectors are similar is in their belief that reading is, in the words of the READ director in an annual report, "the foundation of education" which enables children to "read for meaning, to interact with the text, to extract the desired information and to interpret it, to compare and make logical decisions" (1992:30). All the selectors want children to enjoy their reading and find in it mental and emotional support and a practical means of upward mobility. What is different is READ's more explicit aim to improve skills and competence in English and its emphasis on the local and "relevant." At Good Hope the accent falls more on "literary" criteria and exposing children to books from internationally recommended lists. There is also an assumption that the children have been exposed to the "new literacies+"--even though these are sometimes seen as the enemy, tempting children away from the more traditional forms of literacy. When asked which books in the pre-selection she had chosen, or would choose, the READ selector immediately selected the South African books and rejected books like those by the Ahlbergs and Joan Aiken as too British. In contrast neither the school library nor the Vredehoek public library have any of the South African books in the pre-selection.

READ's position comes down to a rejection of racist policies which have held black children back from social advancement in different ways, like the insufficient provision of resources and the alienating nature of materials provided. Issues of class, the desirability of English and the nature of social advancement are less challenged. Issues of language level are taken up, but in ways that may reinforce language varieties as social markers, and reinforce the assumption, questioned by

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2) There is currently a debate around the issue of imagination and children's books, which surfaced after a review in the Weekly Mail. A reviewer, Pat Sidley, criticised a book, *All the Magic in the World*, for seriously imagining that little children living in squatter camps "retain their imaginations between the tramlines of poverty and deprivation" and called the book "another in the genre which seeks to make life in squatter camps the stuff of children's fantasy" (1993:4). The book's illustrator, Niki Daly, responded by saying that this assumed imagination to be the prerogative of the middle classes. He also said that there were not enough books dealing with working class children. An issue not raised in the correspondence is how imagination itself is socially constructed.

Rose, that there is an ideal sequence from elementary to cultured language. The other selectors do not challenge these issues either. But they are under less pressure to redress past imbalances.

CHAPTER 5
CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON WHAT THEY READ

This chapter is an attempt to "read" and interpret both books and the children who read them, and to understand how children "read" themselves when they read. It will examine the views of the children who joined the research group and also refer to comments made by the children in the larger Std 5 group who spoke to me at Walter Teka. It will start with how children perceive themselves as readers, how they feel when they read and what they do it for. It will go on to describe and situate the way the children selected books for their peers, and conclude with a discussion of issues raised during the selection exercise and in the course of conversation. The initials WT and GH after quotations show from which schools the speakers come, if it is not otherwise indicated. If the voices of Good Hope children predominate, it is because more children came to talk and, in general, they were more articulate.

How the children perceive themselves as readers and why they read

How children perceive themselves as readers appears to have as much to do with the kinds of books they read as it has with ability and opportunity to read. Margaret Meek says that the books that children choose to read "define literacy, and literature, for them" (1991:64). Fry says:

> Our perceptions of ourselves as readers illuminate by analogy our perceptions of ourselves as learners, people who live through experiences and interpret them. "It is as though," writes Eagleton on behalf of Iser, "what we have been 'reading', in working our way through a book, is ourselves" (1985:107).

The primary reason why the children in this study chose to read was for pleasure. Nearly all of them, from both schools, used terms like "fun", or "enjoyable" or "exciting", to describe what reading meant to them. While there

prompting. There was one girl, Allie, who "hated reading" in the Good Hope group. Belinda from Walter Teka actually read very little, but she liked the feel and the pictures and the covers of books.

Generally, the children spent a great deal of time reading. Their calculations as to how long may not have been entirely accurate, but they went through much effort counting and working them out. Some read themselves to sleep at night, sometimes by torchlight, others literally walked around with their noses in a book.

For most children the excitement of reading lay largely in seeing what would happen next. But even predictability held its thrill. One child said, "Sometimes I know what's going to happen next...sometimes I'm right. It's so exciting..." (GH). Several of them said they liked "getting to the end of a book" (GH) or "seeing what happens at the end" (GH). Reading offered them possibilities as well as conclusions and certainties. Natasha loved reading because it gave her an ending but also allowed her to imagine possible endings as she went along. She said, "You can choose your own ending but you also have the ending to the book."

An important aspect of reading was its capacity to transport to another world--"the world-creating power of books, and the reader's effortless absorption" described by Nell (1988:1). Although the children's comments sound cliched, they were expressed with enthusiasm. For one child "it's like you actually travel into the world" (GH), for another "you can imagine you're in the place, you're actually in the book" (GH).

One of the most significant elements of reading, mentioned frequently and spontaneously by both groups, was "picturing." Fry says that picturing and remembering are two vital elements in gaining literary competence (1985:104). The more skilled first and second language readers, who did not need pictures to support the text, said that they liked to "make [their] own pictures" (WT). Some of these readers no longer wanted to find any pictures at all in their books. For others it was irrelevant whether the book was illustrated or not.

The importance of picturing for the children was most evident when comparisons were made between reading texts and interpreting other visual material. In discussions on books, films and videos with the Good Hope children, books were usually rated highly because they allowed readers more space to imagine and picture for themselves. Children said, "movies are nothing compared

to the book" and "they're totally two different things." Books "make you feel you're there, or something." Books are "more exciting and stimulating...in reading you can make your own pictures instead of using someone else's imagination." One boy said he preferred the pictures in his own mind and wanted to "say to the producer it's not like that."

Of course, there were times when a film was more appealing than a book. The younger children at Good Hope, for instance, had all seen *Aladdin* and liked it because it had more action, the genie was more funny and the music was good. The only non-reader in the group probably spoke for a great many children when she said that she preferred films and videos because books took too long and she liked "speedy things." Although she formed pictures in her mind when she read she did not always "get the whole idea."

The most articulate reader was Christal who liked books "where I can become like my own philosopher...like thinking that might happen and what you can do to change it happening." She found that books "jogged" and "added on to" her imagination. She was one of the few children who liked to write as well as read. Most of the others thought writing was "gross" (GH).

Faith was the only child in the Walter Teka group who consciously read for something more than enjoyment and the purely instrumental wish to improve her English. She said she wanted to "remember things." This was her own term, but it corresponds with the terminology used by Fry, who says that remembering is a crucial factor in the development of reader response. He refers to James Britton, who writes that readers "must first recreate an object in all its inner relatedness" and only then try to relate it as a whole to their own concerns and lives. Faith said that when she read a book she liked to feel that "it happens to me." For her remembering is a way of relating the book to her own life. In contrast to the other children in her group, she did "not like to laugh" when she was reading.

In response to questions about the usefulness of reading, replies tended to be luke warm. In her study of how children perceive themselves as readers Caroline Connif (1993) found a divide along gender lines. The boys tended to value reading for utilitarian purposes, while the girls associated reading with pleasure and recognised that reading had the power to illuminate their own lives. In this study most of the children had come to talk because they already enjoyed reading, regardless of gender. Any other benefits of reading were incidental.

The Xhosa speakers were more aware of the value of reading English as a means of social mobility, even if it was not their primary reason for reading English books. They said "you must know English." Reading was seen as a way of improving vocabulary. Nellie said she read to "get to know words." The more conscientious said that they used dictionaries as they read to "get the words in your brain." Their lack of exposure to English generally meant that they had to make these conscious efforts.

The Walter Teka children all thought they would need English to fulfil whatever ambitions they had. Career plans included medicine, law, social work, psychology and engineering, which suggests a possible link between professional aspirations and reading English. However, only two children had serious plans to move into more English speaking environments. Faith was on the waiting list for a reputable Department of Education and Training school and Nellie was wait-listed for a Model C school. Both felt formerly white schools were the best places to improve their English. The fact that they were better readers than the others probably contributed to their confidence that they could manage in a different environment. They were also the only ones in the group who belonged to the Crossroads Library, from which they took mainly Xhosa books. Both had older siblings who had studied and encouraged them to read.

Reading as a social activity: how books were chosen

1. Talk about books

The social nature of reading was evident in the discussions on books which were held with the children and in the selection activity. It could be seen in the exchange and sharing of ideas. Social positioning was implicit in many of the book choices, as was the effect of previous exposure to reading matter. Buckingham and Sefton-Green's proposition that meanings are defined in and through social interaction was noticeable in all the children's discussions.

In the first place, there was debate and talk about books, both in conversations and when books were being chosen. Many of the books the Good Hope children had read were recommendations from peers. Sometimes they sought advice from one another, as when Christal asked some older girls what to read if you had a problem with "like love and romance." They suggested the Sweet Dreams series--a

range of books dealing with adolescent relationships. Christal, in turn, recommended the books to others in her class and they became the staple reading of most of the girls. She had also made the books of Jenny Nimmo popular at the school and asked the librarian to buy some for the school. At Walter Teka, the groups who chose books to discuss with me in class all chose books that were of common interest or had been read by most group members. They wanted to talk about their choices. It was clear in the course of this kind of peer interaction that children were active in constructing a significant part of their reading environment.

2. Choosing books for the school

The selection of books for classmates was also a highly social and interactive process. When they were at the bookshop, the children all sifted rapidly through the books in the pre-selection and circulated those which interested them. Book covers were influential and there was soon consensus on which ones appealed the most. The children read the blurb and pointed things out to one another. They flicked through the pages looking at pictures and print. Both groups were skilled in the conventions of a reading culture.

2 (a) The Walter Teka children

The Walter Teka children approached the books confidently and quickly sorted out what they wanted. *The Mystery of Mr E* was passed around first and seemed to meet with approval. Then the boys picked up *The Headless Snowman* and passed it to the girls. Next the boys looked at and showed the others the more juvenile looking *The Vanishment of Thomas Tull* and *Who Betrayed Guy Fawkes?* This was followed by the *The Three Musketeers*, a classic comic. *Dark Secrets, Red Ink* was the next book of general interest followed by *Vampire* and *Trolley Trouble*. The last two were the final selection.

Trolley Trouble is a picture book about a boy who works at a supermarket and gets into trouble for taking away a trolley when he is not supposed to, so that he can help an old lady. It is illustrated throughout in both black and white and colour. The children liked the cover where the boy is seen hurtling recklessly along a pavement with a trolley. They said it looked exciting and could be amusing. Their class liked to laugh at books. *Vampire*, also thin and illustrated, was selected because

some of the children had seen films and videos about vampires and said the class had too. They liked the bold print.

In some ways the choice of books for their classmates mirrored the kind of choice READ would make. The children and READ seemed to have a shared idea of what was suitable. The books looked easy to read. They were thin and both were fairly extensively illustrated. The reasons given for selecting *Trolley Trouble* were its bold print and the prospect that it might be amusing. The book seemed to cover READ's criteria of readability and local content. *Vampire* was also thin with bold print. While its content could not be described as local, the children chose it because some of them had seen films and videos about vampires and they said their class had too. It did not reflect their environment but it reflected a "site of cultural interest."

When the children were given the opportunity to think about what they would personally like to read, differences between what was right for the class and right for themselves immediately emerged. Faith and Nellie promptly chose more difficult looking books. All except Belinda and Sharon returned to books they had picked up initially, revealing an interest in mystery stories, which was also apparent in the choices of the younger Good Hope children. Faith returned to *Dark Secrets, Red Ink*, which was not illustrated. She liked the dramatic cover which she interpreted as being about a man keeping a secret from a woman. She was not put off by the length, although she agreed after a moment's hesitation that that her classmates might prefer something shorter. Nellie went back to *The Mystery of Mr E*. Belinda chose a large, colourfully illustrated version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* from the shelves. She said she already knew the story and she spent a long time poring over the book. Sharon wanted *The Magic Finger*. She liked stories about magic and the "bold letters" and pictures appealed to her. Shaun liked *The Three Musketeers*, largely because the comic book format appealed to him. He thought he would be amused by it. Thapelo liked *Who Killed Guy Fawkes?*

The negotiation as to which books would be best for their classmates did not take long and there was little dissension, possibly because choices were being based on what was already provided at school. But when the children had identified the books they personally wanted and were told they could take only one of them back to school, they were less co-operative. It seemed that while they agreed on what the class would enjoy, when it came to individual choices the most forceful child took her book back to school. Nellie won out with *The Mystery of Mr E*, an

adventure story set in Botswana. The chief attraction was the picture of a headless man disappearing into the bushes while amazed people stare at him from their car. The book is one of the Heinemann Young African Writers Series, which is used extensively by READ selectors. It was a familiar kind of book, but more appropriate for faster readers, like Nellie herself.

2 (b) The Good Hope children

The Good Hope children also sifted through the books quickly and efficiently. The Std 5s swopped books, read covers and soon landed in a situation where there were two main contenders. The debate as to which book to take was long and stubborn and lasted until it was time to leave. The final choice was *On Fortune's Wheel* by Cynthia Voight, which Christal had already read. She had pounced on it on arrival, declaring that the others would definitely enjoy it. The other children wanted *The Book of Three*, the first book in a trilogy described as a Welsh fantasy epic. Most of the other books were dismissed as "boring" or "factual" or "soppy." The Standard 5s had probably felt that they had outgrown the illustrated stories-- they joked about them as "baby books"-- and they were scornful of books they had read when they were younger. *The Blossoms meet the Vulture Lady* by Betsy Byars drew an "ugh." The boring books were those that had plain covers with faces only on them, or a book like *The Jasmine Candle*, whose cover was seen as "artistic" but not appealing.

The Std 4s initially looked at adventure stories. If they had been confined to the pre-selection of books they would have chosen between *The Mystery of Mr E* and *The Secret of Hackjaw Island*. There was split vote, which was resolved in favour of Mr E. But then the children discovered a pile of Usborne Puzzle adventure stories and spent the rest of their time poring over them. After that the only real issue was which one they would ultimately take. These stories have puzzles at the end of each page, which the reader has to solve through clues in pictures, diagrams and dialogue. They feed into the solution of the big mystery at the end of the book. In the end the children opted for *Danger at Demon's Cove* because it looked "scary." The emphasis in these books is more on the puzzle than the story and they can easily be read by groups as well as individuals.

The Std 3s also chose a highly interactive book - a "choose your own adventure" story called *The Secret of the Dolphins*, from the pre-selection. They had debated at length between this book and a similar one from the shelves called

The Forest of Doom, but finally chose the Dolphin one becouse it was more about "the environment." One girl, Natasha, did not want this sort of book at all. She withdrew from the discussion--her choice was a fantasy adventure called *The Book of Merlin*, which had had some support until the "choose your own adventure" books took over.

Neither puzzle books nor "choose your own adventure" books were in the school or public libraries. They seemed to be part of a popular culture, rather than books sanctioned by authority. They also seemed to be part of a culture of childhood, of reading children chose for themselves.

2 (c) Comparison

The differences in the kinds of books chosen by each group reflect a division between first and second language speakers, in that the Walter Teka children chose books where the text was easier to manage. They wanted books with more illustrations, they explicitly wanted bold print, and they were not interested in long books. Faith and Nellie were, to a certain extent, exceptions.

Previous exposure to books also influenced choice. The kind of exposure children are given to books is very much part of their social environment. Colin Mills says:

> When children read their first independent texts, they not only bring linguistic resources, they bring social and cultural understandings. They bring understandings of other texts, codes of interpretation learned from their "reading" of popular culture. They bring the "stances" of wonder, interpretation and evaluation that they have learned from teachers and other co-readers (Isn't that funny? I wonder what?). They use also those shared processes of sense-making which they have learned socially (1988:49).

In the case of the Walter Teka children, their exposure to READ's book selections influenced their understanding of what was appropriate reading matter. However, exposure to popular culture was more evident in the choices of the Good Hope children. Their choice of interactive books was not sanctioned by authority, but it did come out of a culture of children's reading. The books were fashionable, and acquired more often from co-readers than from teachers. The Walter Teka children had not encountered "choose your own adventure" books before, so did not home in on them in the way the Good Hope children did. When they were given one to try out, Nellie reported that they found it "confusing." This was partly

because they were unfamiliar with the convention and partly because the need to flip back and forth through the book made understanding a second language more difficult.

These "social understandings" are influenced by the physical environment and the actual resources available in it. The children at Good Hope simply have more books to choose from--they have a large library, which some of them have outgrown already and ready access to two public libraries. In contrast, the Walter Teka children have their classroom library and one public library in the vicinity. The Good Hope children have more opportunities to use electronic media, even though they are not generally from homes with personal computers (about one third of the group had them). This makes them more confident users of "new literacies."

The amount of encouragement provided by the institution is another factor. Most teachers tell children that it is good to read. But they may not practise what they preach. At Good Hope the principal is an ex-librarian with strong views on reading. She feels that not enough children read, but there is every encouragement for those who do. At Walter Teka the English teacher has done her best to create a library from the READ boxes and she sets aside reading time for her pupils. There is also encouragement from the READ facilitator who holds weekly group reading sessions with some of the classes. But there is not a system of regularly issuing books to everyone--the children take books home from school by arrangement with the teacher. The principal recognises the value of reading but confesses that in practice he does not set a good example. In short, although both schools promote reading, Good Hope does it more actively. There is more print available and there are more supports generally within and outside the school for children who want to read.

Similarities in book preferences between the schools were more observable in what the Walter Teka Std 5s liked and the books that interested the Std 3s from Good Hope. In both groups there was a tendency to go for illustrated adventure stories. This can probably be attributed to the fact that they offered more support for less experienced readers--through pictures, length and story line. The children's "understandings of other texts and codes of interpretation" made these books readily accessible to them.

3. Positioning themselves as readers

How the children chose books positioned them as readers. Buckingham and Sefton Green argue that how individuals talk about and use what they read is part of how they socialise themselves into group membership and construct cultural identities. They say that readers define themselves in terms of what they are not, as well as what they are, and develop hypotheses about how other people read. Readers distinguish, for example, in terms of gender, ethnicity, social position, "fans" and less committed readers, in a process that is complex and tentative but also essentially active. The meanings given to the various distinctions and how they are socially distributed are "reconstructed and renegotiated through social interaction" (1993:4).

On the part of the children, the reasons for rejecting books revealed clear positioning. Snow White was Belinda's first choice but it was rejected by the other Walter Teka children as being too childish (and the Good Hope children laughed and joked when they saw it). They all saw themselves as beyond that reading stage. It was one of the books that was "too easy." They no longer belonged to such a babyish reading group. But the rejection of Natasha's choice of fantasy adventure in favour of a "choose your own adventure" book was not because her book was for some group other than themselves. It was a book that was of interest to them, and they had nothing against Natasha herself. It was more that they had found something else that positioned them as part of a larger group with something of a craze for that kind of book.

Gender was another factor which influenced positioning. In the Buckingham and Sefton Green study there was some evidence that the different reading predelictions of boys and girls became accentuated as they moved into the secondary phase of education. The Education Library Service hand-out on what children like at different ages also indicates this. Socialisation into gender roles will not be discussed here. In this sample the children nearly all saw themselves as reading primarily for enjoyment and said they were prepared to try most books. At Good Hope gender issues emerged more in the discussion of what their classmates would like. The Good Hope Std 3s justified picking the "choose your own adventure" book on the grounds that all the boys would like it and some of the girls. The girls were defined as preferring romance, Betsy Byars books and "teenager stuff"--although there was not much evidence of this in the choices they made in the bookshop, where adventure stories dominated. By Std 5 the girls' preferences were

given precedence as it was thought that not enough boys were readers for their claims to be considered.

Age was also a factor. The Good Hope children categorised their school-mates according to age groups, although they saw themselves as exceptions. There was a general feeling that Std 3s liked Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl and C.S.Lewis, the Std 4s preferred sport to reading and the Std 5s read the Sweet Dreams series. In other words, there was a shift from the younger children all reading certain books through a stage where other activities took precedence, to older readers being mainly girls with an interest in romantic fiction. This was a shared perception and did seem to indicate that gender differences are accentuated as children reach puberty.

Features of books

All the children said that they judged books by their covers. The book that both groups condemned out of hand was *Snookered*, agreed by all to have the most boring cover. It depicted two boys playng snooker on a plain blue background. None of the children were interested in snooker and there was no promise of anything else indicated on the cover. They said it looked "factual" (GH) and they did not like factual books. However, although there was agreement on the most unpopular cover, some covers were more controversial and led to very different interpretations. *Dark Secrets, Red Ink* attracted Faith who saw it as leading to mystery and adventure. Michael in Std 3 at Good Hope saw it as "satanist."

Certain other features of the books also proved to be important considerations, especially for the Walter Teka children who had to grapple with English as a second language. Firstly, they picked books with plenty of illustrations for the class, although they ranged as individuals from Thapelo who hated books with no pictures to the better readers who did not feel the need for pictures at all. They were like the older first language children who preferred books without illustrations because they liked their own pictures better. In fact the keen readers at Walter Teka, like Faith and Nellie, were quite disapproving of illustrations. They said that it was better to have words only because it made their classmates read--otherwise they just looked at the pictures if they could get away with it.

The help provided by pictures for very inexperienced readers, or for readers whose use of a second language is shaky, accords with the READ selectors' perceptions and with what McGill-Franzen has to say on supports for inexperienced

readers. However, although pictures were used as support, it did not mean that other diagrammatic supports like maps were always used or even noticed. This may be because they are unfamiliar devices or simply skipped over if they are at the beginning of the book, as part of the uninteresting information like date of publication. *The Mystery of Mr E* had a map of the game reserve in which the story was set opposite the first page. Only Faith noticed it was there--the others did not see it. They just opened the book and plunged in.

Bold print was also very important for the second language children. It often came up as a reason for liking a book. They said they would always choose a book with bold letters if they could. They did not like small letters. They would only choose a book with small print if it looked very much more exciting than an alternative with big print.

Length was another consideration. Most of the Xhosa speaking children would not think of reading a thick book in English. *On Fortune's Wheel*, chosen by the English speakers was not even considered. Only Faith and Nellie were not daunted by length of The Mystery of Mr E, which had 92 pages.

Mirrors, windows, relevance

Providing children with reflections of themselves and their lives is a concern for many selectors, and a particular concern for READ. Readers can see their reflections in characters, cultural behaviour and setting. In an attempt to find out how important it was for children to find some of these reflections in the books they read, I asked them how they felt about South African books, which are usually assumed to reflect their own lives. I will discuss their response to settings of stories and then to the issues addressed in some South African books.

1. Settings

The Walter Teka children were adamant that setting was not important to them--the story was. The race of characters was also declared irrelevant. In the initial general discussions at Walter Teka, the issue of black characters came up in one group where a book about Martin Luther King had been chosen as something they had all liked. The children stated that it "doesn't matter" whether the characters in books are black or not. Another group, which ultimately included most of the inter-

view group, said a South African setting did not matter as long as the story was good.

According to their teacher, the children do like to read about everyday life and they do not like the unfamiliar. But unfamiliar is defined more as rural, not foreign. The children see themselves as urban. She described how she had read them a book recently set in the South African countryside, in which they had encountered the word "gourd." The children had found it all too unfamiliar. In fact, the teacher also distanced herself from it--she said she was not sure of the pronunciation. The preference of urban children for urban stories was confirmed by the READ book selector who found that children in urban areas loved books by Judy Blume and S.E.Hinton. She also said the Japhta series, which selectors and co-ordinators love, does not seem to be enjoyed by the children.

The lack of concern for setting displayed by Walter Teka children was evident to some extent in the Good Hope children. But they were much more vehement in their rejection of local books. South African books were dismissed by most of them as being about "tribes and farms." Two children said they did like books about tribes--they were the two who most liked myths and legends. Jenny Seed is considered "more interesting" than most (and the school librarian said her books were amongst the most popular) but the general consensus was South African books were "boring." Books "from abroad are just better." Asked if a book set in Cape Town would have more appeal, most were not very interested. The confessed non-reader said it would not interest her. She could not "picture" Cape Town because it was already there. In other words, the known reality intruded on the world of the book. Most of the children will only read South African books if something else about the story appeals. For example, in *The Mystery of Mr E*, his headlessness struck them first, as it did the Walter Teka children. What this indicates is that these children often seem to read past the setting and find it an irritating distraction if too familiar.

However, a lack of interest in the over-familiar does not mean that anything very foreign is enjoyed. If a story has elements that are too alien, it will be abandoned. If the unfamiliar bits are not vital to the plot they get skipped. An example is the Yorkshire accents in The Secret Garden, which was read to the Good Hope children by a teacher. They liked having the accents read aloud but would not have engaged with them on their own.

It seems that for most of the children too many cultural specifics are a distraction, whether local or not. They want to get on with the story and they want the freedom to do their own picturing. Fry also describes this response and says one of the reasons the Blyton books are so popular is that it is so easy to visualise the location of the story. Brief descriptions of a cafe or a wood or a warehouse are given and the reader does not have to imagine a specific place or a local or regional atmosphere. For the reader

> [h]is own knowledge of his own home territory is all he needs. As the action is not specifically taking place *there*, then the reader is free to imagine that it could be happening *here* (1985:49).

Many adventure stories offer readers these broad spaces in which to insert their own images and such stories seemed most popular.

If one accepts Appleyard's thesis that readers take different roles at different times in their reading careers, one could say that these readers are in the stage where the reader as hero or heroine is the main concern. The setting is of secondary interest and may only be significant if it has a direct bearing on the plot.

Issues and characters in books

With regard to the issues dealt with in South African books, certain topics seem to be too unpleasant or too close to the bone. At Walter Teka, which is close to the Nyanga taxi rank, a scene of periodic fighting and killing, the children were all adamant that they did not like books about violence and war. It came up at every interview. They said there was "too much blood and killing." This does not imply that only gentle, safe-looking stories are liked. Two groups in the initial discussion picked *The Innocent Prisoner*, a Heinemann Young African Writers book, as something they had either enjoyed or wanted to read. The cover shows a young man being manhandled by two policemen. But they did not think it would be a very violent book. It seemed to promise adventure, not gruesome detail. The teacher says reading books set in the township is "too much for them", as if it is "promoting the violence" and it "doesn't help."

Another social issue which came up was squatting. This is a sensitive subject and it has been sympathetically handled in recent books like *At the Crossroads* and *Love, David*. But books may be rejected because of the topic not the treatment. The teacher at Walter Teka felt that squatting was a sensitive issue. She said that it

The teacher at Walter Teka felt that squatting was a sensitive issue. She said that it did not present "a good picture." Nobody liked to be in that situation. It is "as if blacks are supposed to be like that." Once again divergent class interests were at play. There is a concern that all blacks will be categorised in the same way, although many do not live in such conditions. For those who are squatters, escapism may be a more attractive option than a graphic portrayal of their lives. Themes like squatting seem to go against the class interests and aspirations of the children. They probably need good mediation to be well received. They may be more of a window for more comfortably housed children than source of enjoyment for children who know all about squatting.

Of common interest to both groups, particularly at Std 5 level, were books about interpersonal relationships. At Walter Teka some groups said they liked "books about the future," by which they meant stories about things that could happen soon in their own lives, like conflicts with parents or problems with boyfriends and girlfriends. This interest could also be observed in the Good Hope children's predilection for the Sweet Dreams series, dealing with young love, friendships, and family conflicts. The readership was mainly Std 5s and mainly girls, who acknowledged the books were "sappy" but still read them. Regarding these sorts of books, Fry says:

> Older readers are often pleased by novels that recapture their sense of how life was; but but for younger readers, their lives still very much before them, novels are often valuable for their insights into present and future experience, how it is and might be. This is not simply a matter of information or advice, but an aid to that essential picturing we all do in advance of new experience, when we run through in our imaginations what it might be like (1985:98).

Two of the girls were already outgrowing the Sweet Dreams series. Robyn found books by Paul Zindel better because they were funny and romantic and "all sorts of things." Christal found the stories too predictable. She said, "I know what's going to happen." She was taking up the suggestions of librarians to move on to other novels. In contrast, Nellie did not like love stories because she felt she was too young for them.

At Walter Teka, a dominant "social and cultural understanding" was that books should teach a moral. *Khokho the Lazy* was a popular choice in the general class group because it "teaches what mother says." Another reason for its popularity was that it had been read in class and there was a Xhosa version available. But its main attraction seemed to be that it was both funny and moral.

In general, the children liked characters who did things that they wanted to do. The Walter Teka children liked all the "helpful" characters, whether they were helping to solve a mystery or push a trolley. They also liked the boy in *Trolley Trouble* because he worked. They all wanted to get some kind of job. Sharon liked the boy having the responsibility of a job.

The Good Hope children liked stories about people who bucked the system. In a discussion of the work of Roald Dahl a character they liked was Charlie of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* because he was a poor boy who had made good, not one of the "rich snobs" who got things by paying. Some had read and had liked Danny *(Danny, Champion of the World)* who fulfilled his ambition through being "clever and smart." They liked it when children did better than adults or managed on their own. They were more interested in independence from adults than helpfulness.

The Mystery of Mr E was the only book read by children from both schools. It is a story about three children who help to catch a poaching ring operating in a game park in Botswana. Two of the children live on the game reserve--their father is the chief game ranger--and the third is a cousin called Shakespeare who comes from Soweto. He is tall, thin, deaf and very erudite, a stereotypic weed. At first his cousins make fun of him, but he is the one who finally solves the mystery. The poachers prove to be members of an earthmoving company employed in the game park, and Mr E is a short man from the company who has pulled his track top with the company logo on it over his head to remain unrecognised. As it happens, he is not a poacher, but is hunting in the local caves for gold which his family has for many years believed to be hidden there. The treasure turns out to be fool's gold, but the denouement takes place in the caves, which are also the poachers' hideout.

For the Walter Teka children the game reserve setting was irrelevant. They said the story was more important. None of them had ever been to a game reserve, and none wanted to go to one. The closest they had to any concern was feeling that poaching was wrong. In fact, settings generally did not inspire them to want to travel--they preferred to read about them, not to go there. The Std 3s from Good Hope liked the story, and two of them liked the setting, but they happened to be children who were fond of animals and were concerned about conservation.

The characters in this story could be described as empty or stereotypical but they leave plenty of space for readers to "inject their own characteristics, their own

motives,their own psychologies" (Sarland, 1991:79). The erudite Shakespeare was the most popular character. Zoe said he was like a dictionary or an encyclopaedia. Sharon admired his knowledge and wanted to be like him. Nellie liked the "helpfulness" of all three of the children in the story. She also thought Mr E was a helpful character, and Zoe thought he was "quite clever" to pull his top over his head.

The fact that many of the characters in the story might be condemned as stereotypes was not even noticed. The children seemed to like the what Sarland calls "the empty categories created by the stereotypic characterisation" (1991:90).

Fry says stereotypes and formulaic stories give readers "context support" (1985:54), before they move on to other kinds of reading. This moving on can be seen in the reading of Crystal and Robyn, already mentioned.

The Mystery of Mr E fits into the category described by Sims Bishop where there is little attempt to reflect a culture other than the dominant one. It is affirming for black children in that there are no white characters and there is no conflict of interest between black and white characters. Zoe from Good Hope said it was the first South African book she had enjoyed, probably because it was more of a formulaic adventure story than an attempt to capture a slice of South African life.

For the children in this study reading is a positive experience. They appear to be more interested in a good story than they are in the issues that concern book selectors. They often read against the text in ways described by Eco and Sarland. Their desire to picture what they read for themselves means that they do not always want much detail or local colour.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

What has come out of this exercise is a picture of some of the conditions that influence the reading preferences of two different groups of children with different exposure to books and different cultural capital. The institutions supplying their books have agendas which differ in a number of ways.

Walter Teka is supplied by READ whose aims are compensatory. It tries to counteract the effects of apartheid, both in providing books to under-resourced schools and in choosing books which have local settings, black characters and relatively easy language. Good Hope is not engaged in compensatory action. It is struggling to maintain a status quo in standards and book provision, as its pupil population and funding change. This means it continues to provide books of "literary" merit, defined in middle class and Westernised terms, and seen as being in competition with some of the new literacies.

Both agendas have their limitations. In focusing on a particular conception of relevance, READ may not be taking into sufficient account nomadic identity and the emphasis young readers place on story rather than theme and setting. The preference for simple language may be necessary given the competence of their learners, but may not help learners to move beyond the elementary. However, the issues taken up by READ have not been tackled at Good Hope. There has been little attempt to find books by black writers or to widen the definition of literature. Both schools could learn from the work of the other.

The literature/literacy division identified by Meek was evident in the thinking of the book selectors. At Good Hope children were expected to move from literacy

The children themselves seemed largely oblivious to both relevance and literary merit. But their reading preferences revealed ways in which social meaning and social positioning were derived from reading. Most of the children positioned themselves as readers in one way or another. As individuals they ranged from Belinda who was unskilled but wanted to be a reader, to Zoe who compulsively read adventure stories, ballet stories and animal stories, to Faith and Christal for whom reading meant the pleasure of being lost in a book but was also a way of refining their thinking.

In positioning themselves as readers, the children saw themselves as being in opposition to non-readers. Sometimes this was a result of received attitudes. For example, Zoe said television was "junk." This probably had something to do with parental views--there was no television in her home--as well as her own preference for reading. Another example is the way readers at Walter Teka poured scorn on their classmates who only looked at illustrations when they were supposed to be reading.

However, the children also formed social groups as readers of different kinds of books. An example was the group rejection of babyish books, like the brightly illustrated fairy tales favoured by Belinda. Another was the cluster of girls who read the Sweet Dreams series. Although they recognised the books' limitations, they liked the stories and found in them the cultural information they were seeking. Past exposure to books also influenced reading and how confidently children dealt with books. When the children at Walter Teka chose books for their classmates along the same lines as those chosen by READ, they were drawing on past exposure. They used the same criteria, even though they chose differently for themselves. The younger Good Hope children chose books that were not like those in their library. They were more confident about challenging the norm, more exposed to books generally.

The social nature of reading was evident in the willingness to talk about reading, and in the common attitudes that were formed towards certain kinds of books. The Good Hope children were confident in speaking and in choosing. They were prepared to try most books, but their readiness to take positions and to reject books like those by local writers came close to prejudice at times. The Walter Teka children were more adaptive in that they read Xhosa books and both local and imported English books.

New directions

The debate around what children should read is already moving on. In an editorial in *Innovation*, a journal for librarians, the need for "new voices" is endorsed, with a reference to the need to challenge the dominance of established publishers and an invitation to openness in editorial direction. The question of balance is also raised. Christine Stilwell and Nalini Dickson pose a number of questions:

> How, for instance, do "first world" authors fit into the South African literary scene? How can they be relevant to our particular circumstances? Is there a danger in placing too much emphasis on relevance in South African literature? (1993:1)

They go on to comment on a remark by Edward Rosenheim that the principle of familiarity, or comfortable recognition, can sometimes be overworked. Rosenheim said that although it is often argued that children cannot be expected to show an interest in the unfamiliar and that literature should not make too many demands on them, effective imaginative literature is an amalgam of the old and the new and should introduce novelty and challenge.

READ itself is trying to introduce new voices in the recent production of a set of books aimed at giving children access to different cultures in South Africa. The books were initially workshopped with children, but rewritten by more mainstream writers. A shift of emphasis is the translation of the stories into eight different languages. The books can be bought with materials for teachers, an indication that READ feels teachers need to be guided in presenting them, as well as responding to teachers own felt needs.

Perhaps a greater recognition of diversity and multiplicity is needed, both in terms of reading matter generally and in terms of recognising the multitude of voices that come from texts. In book selection the emphasis could fall on extending rather than limiting the books available, even within the limitations of financial restraints. In introducing an article by Geoffrey Williams, Meek says:

> We are encouraged to move away from naive judgements of suitability (which book?) to take on the task of "constructing powerful critical theory and critical practice..." (1988:151).

For selectors this carries with it the risk of trusting the readers to be critical.

In terms of texts themselves, there could be greater recognition that discourse is derived from multiple voices, even if a particular voice is more privileged than others. Cynthia Lewis suggests that children should be encouraged to recognise the "multivoicedness" of texts as a matter of course.

> ...given the cumulative nature of learning, acknowledging different voices in texts is a way of taking [meaning] from books that children can gradually participate in, just as they now traditionally learn to read for authors's purpose and a host of other designated skills (1993:460).

While some of these skills may not have arrived in all South African schools, this does not preclude children and teachers from hearing different voices in texts and talking about them. Lewis says that ways of reading are "imbued with social and political content" (1993:458). Although it may be a teacher's responsibility to help children to find ways of taking meaning from books that match the expectations of those in power, she says that children need to know that they too have formed legitimate readings. Only then can they go on to listen for other voices. She says that encouraging children

> to listen for other voices while legitimating [their] own would help [them] to understand that in literature, as in life, these differences create a tension we all have to acknowledge before we can find a place for ourselves, before we can begin to take a position (1993:460).

Williams also says that children should be encouraged to appreciate the plurality of texts. Through critical discussion teachers can help children "expect multiple senses in all narrative, and to learn to discover some that are latent for themselves" (1988:152).

Critical discussion need not be interpreted as expecting all children to interrogate the fiction they read. But it can mean that they are given an awareness of what lies behind their reading and given the confidence to discover, interpret and understand it. It can mean making explicit the expectation that there is more than one way of reading a text.

As important as recognising voices in texts, is learning to talk back to them and about them. Children can be encouraged to develop their own "literate voices", capable of making connections between different texts and between texts and their own lives. Susan Kidd Villaume and Thomas Worden, in an article on developing literate voices, say that the way people react to and interpret the world through

experiences, conversations and all forms of the media is a mark of their literate voices. They say:

> Literate voices explore how their past experiences impact their current attitudes and understandings. Literate voices seek out and value different viewpoints in order to refine their understandings of themselves and their world. Literate voices listen to others but do not expect to be told how to respond to experiences; their responses are personal but thoughtful. Literate voices are awake, alive, and stimulated by the complexity of the world around them (1993:468).

The children who spoke to me were all developing literate voices in one way or another. Everything they read was helping to stimulate those voices. What needs to be recognised is the multitude and value of voices that already influence their lives, and what needs to be worked on is ways of helping children to engage in further dialogue with those voices through their reading.

What this thesis has shown is that the construction of readers by book selectors does not necessarily coincide with the way readers construct themselves. This is not to imply that selectors should not pursue their agendas. But it leads to questions of how best to go about expanding the dialogue between children and selectors and amongst children themselves.

APPENDIX 1
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHILDREN

The children were nearly all keen readers. Because there will be many references to individual children in Chapter 4, what follows is a list of their names with a very brief description of what they said their interests were.

Walter Teka

Faith (14) She reads both Xhosa and English books in her spare time. Member of the Crossroads library. Family supportive of reading habit. Has an elder brother at the University of the Western Cape. Serious child

Nellie (12) Likes to read many kinds of books. Member of the Crossroads library. Reads after doing her homework. Takes initiative - she approached me about being in the group and also was the telephone contact for the group. Has a supportive family.

Belinda (14) Keen to be part of group. Admits to reading less than the others when pressed. Likes fairy stories. Says she was told stories when younger

Sharon (11) Reads at home. Likes picture books and stories about magic. Says she likes to read English more than Xhosa. Has time to read. Only other people at home are parents and younger brother.

Shaun (13) Likes magazines and colourful pictures. Says he reads slowly. Mother read to him as a child.

Thapelo (11) Hates books with no pictures.

Good Hope

Std 5

Robyn Reads about five books a week, "lots and lots" of comics and newspaper comics. Likes to watch TV and read at the same time. Moving from Sweet Dreams to other adolescent fiction like Paul Zindel. Member of Vredehoek library.

Adrian Reads mostly horror books from his elder sister's large collection. Also reads comics and Jenny Nimmo. Member of Vredehoek library.

Lisa Reads mainly Sweet Dreams, also some "teenage troubles" and horror books. Reads every day in the afternoons or before going to sleep. Member of Vredehoek library.

Allie Only non-reader in the group. Prefers TV, finds books too slow. Belongs to Koeberg library.

Christal Voracious reader. Reads many kinds of books. Watches TV too, but finds reading more stimulating. Academically successful. Sets trends in others'

reading. Retells stories to her mother. (this seems to be a form of therapy - her mother falls asleep every time) Member of Vredehoek library.

Std 4

Michael Reads on the way home from school and in bed, by torchlight. Likes Roald Dahl and a series of books on enchantment and mythical creatures. Member of Westridge library.

Angelique Reads before going to bed. Likes Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton and books about adolescents.

Clint Likes adventure books, game books and Roald Dahl.

Samantha Likes mysteries. Watches TV as soon as homework is finished.

Std 3

Piotr Likes fantasies, mysteries and action, especially Hardy Boys and Sherlock Holmes. Says he reads 30 hours a week, watches TV for two and a half hours. Does sport for two hours. Enthusiastic. Reads after midnight. Polish speaking family, but fully assimilated into English medium school.

Zoe Reads many books. Particular favourites are Enid Blyton adventures, C.S.Lewis, ballet stories, animal stories. Does not like illustrations, prefers own images. Reads at least two and a half hours a day. Thinks TV is "garbage." Member of Vredehoek library.

Natasha Reads a lot, likes fantasy adventure. Has a large collection of books at home. Member of Vredehoek Library.

Evelyn Reads mainly Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, comics and folk tales. Spends about three hours a day reading. Does not have a TV at home. Member of Vredehoek library.

Gail Spends two to three hours a day reading. Spends about the same amount of time watching TV.

Stephen Likes Enid Blyton adventure stories and all Roald Dahl's books. Also likes non-fiction, especially to do with science. Reads for about two and a half hours a day and watches less than an hour's TV a day.

APPENDIX 2

CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN THE PRE-SELECTION

Ahlberg, J.& A. (1977) *The Vanishment of Thomas Tull.* Harmondsworth, Puffin.

Aiken, J. (1962) *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase.* Harmondsworth, Puffin.

Alexander, L. (1963) *The Book of Three: First Chronicles of Prydain.* Glasgow, Lions.

Anderson, S. (1992) *The Curse of Hackjaw Island.* Harmondsworth, Puffin.

Botchway, C.A. (1993) *The Jasmine Candle.* Cambridge, Heineman Heartbeats.

Bregin, E. (1992) *The Boy from the Other Side.* Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman Young Africa Series.

Buchanan Smith, D. (1986) *A Taste of Blackberries.* Harmondsworth, Puffin.

Byars, B. (1986) *The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady.* London, Piper.

Dahl, R. (1966) *The Magic Finger.* London,Young Puffin.

De Swardt, N. (1993) *The Red Blanket.* Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman Young Africa Series.

Dumas, A.(1990) adaptation by Kimberly, M. *The Three Musketeers.* London, Classic Comics, Hawk Books.

Gray, N. & C.Scruton (1991) *Private Eye of New York.* Glasgow, Young Lions.

Guy, R. (1987) *And I Heard a Bird Sing.* Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Hardcastle, M. (1987) *Snookered.* London, Hippo.

McCall Smith, A. (1992) *Princess Trick.* Glasgow, Blackie Children's Books, The Story Factory.

McLeod, A. (1980) *Who Betrayed Guy Fawkes?* London, MacDonald

Mooser, S. (1992) *The Headless Snowman.* New York, Dell Yearling.

Naidoo, B. (1989) *Chain of Fire*. Glasgow, Lions.

Nimmo, J. (1991) *Delilah and the Dogspell*. London, Mammoth.

Packard, E. (1993) *The Secret of the Dolphins*. New York, Bantam.

Polidori, J. (adapted L.Martin) (1989) *The Vampire*. New York, Step-up Classic Chillers, Random House.

Ryland, C. (1988) *A Kindness*. Glasgow, Lions Tracks.

Sadler, M. (1992) *The Mystery of Mr E*. Oxford, Heineman Young African Writers Series.

Saunders, S. (1988) *Dark Secrets, Red Ink*. London, MacDonald.

Steinke, A.E. (1986) *Cheerleaders: Rivals*. London, Hippo.

Swan, D.K. (1989) *Robin Hood*. Harlow, Longman Classics.

Voight, C. (1992) *On Fortune's Wheel*. Glasgow, Lions.

Ure, J. (1988) *Frankie's Dad*. London, Beaver.

Whyle, H.A. (1993) *Trolley Trouble*. Oxford, Heineman Young African Writers, Oxford.

Wright, R. (1991) *Ear-rings from Frankfurt*. Oxford, Bookworms.

A LIST OF THE BOOKS THAT WERE CHOSEN AND TAKEN BACK TO THE SCHOOLS

Books chosen by Walter Teka children

Trolley Trouble, Heidi Anne Whyle, (Heinemann Young African Writers Series, 1993)

The story of a boy who works at a supermarket. He gets into trouble with the owner for letting an old lady remove a trolley to take her purchases home. After a series of mishaps he is forgiven.

Vampire, John Polidori, adapted from Les Martin (Step up Classic Chillers, Random House, 1989)

The tale of a man who turns into a vampire. He attacks a young girl who is rescued by her brother.

The Mystery of Mr E, Mike Sadler, (Heinemann Young African Writers Series, 1992)

An adventure story about three children who uncover a poaching ring in a game park in Botswana. The mysterious Mr E proves to be a man who pulls his tracksuit top over his head so as not to be recognised. He is on a separate mission to find gold in the local caves which the poachers are using as a hide out.

Books chosen by Good Hope children

The Secret of the Dolphins, Edward Packard, (Bantam Choose Your Own Adventure Series, 1993)

The reader chooses the route the story takes. Basically it concerns a boy who is surfing. He is washed up on an isolated spot by a tidal wave. He rescues a baby dolphin. Later he, in turn, is rescued by dolphins.

Danger at Demon's Cove, Karen Dolby and Graham Round, (Usborne Puzzle Adventure Series, 1989)

A smuggler story, where the mystery is unravelled as readers work out puzzles.

On Fortune's Wheel, Cynthia Voight, (Lions Paperback, 1992)

A romantic adventure set in the nineteenth century. A girl helps a young man who proves to be the son of a nobleman.

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